





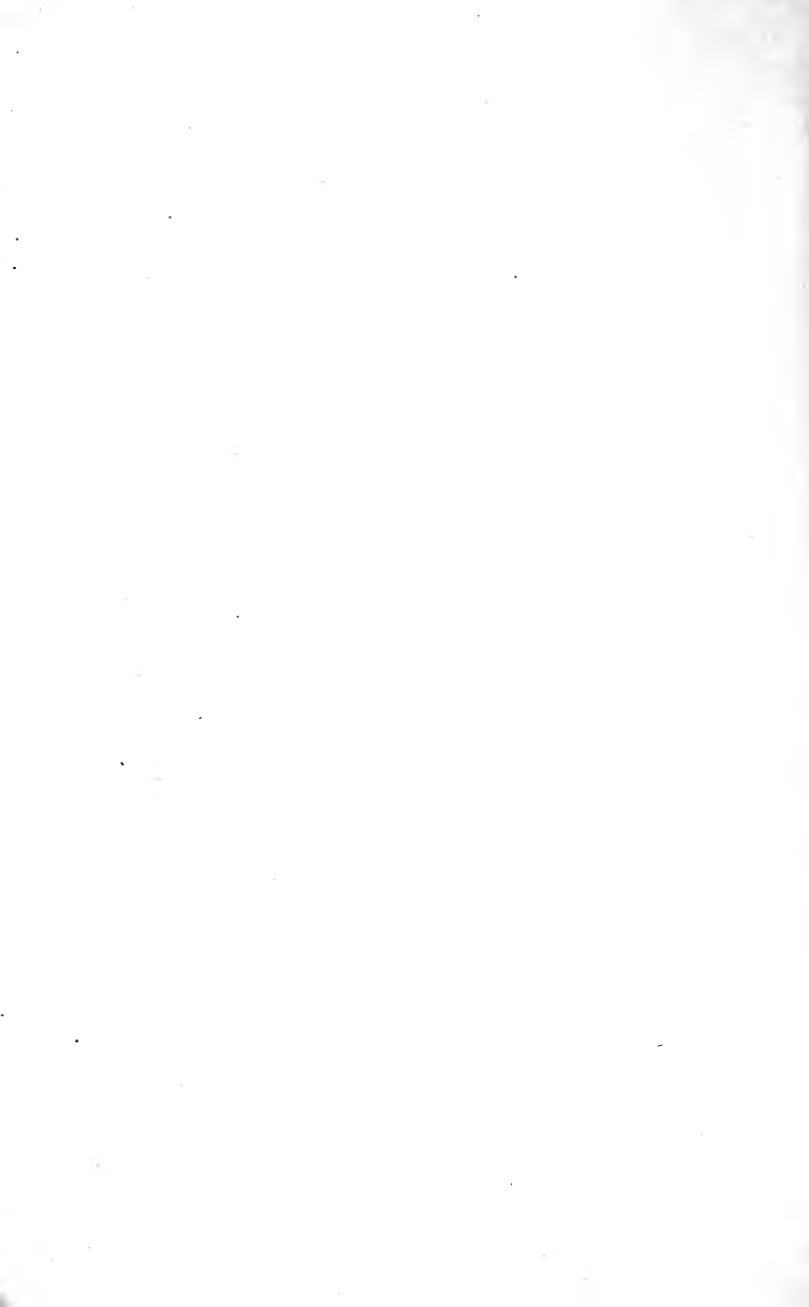
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BRITOMART.



BY

Mrs. Herbert Martin,

Author of

"Bonnie Lesley," "Common Clay,"

"A Man and a Brother," etc.

"Faire Britomart, whose constant mind
Ne reekt of ladies love . . .
She forward went
With stedfast courage and stout hardiment.
Ne evil thing she feared, ne evil thing she ment."



In Three Volumes.

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BRITOMART.

CHAPTER I.

IF Mrs. Trevenna had been left to the fears and hesitations of her own mind, she would never have arrived at the courage to face the ordeal which Mr. Grey's summons to her husband's death-bed placed before her. He wrote with brief, simple kindness, as if they had been friends; but the fact he announced was terrifying to her. It was Penrose's determination that she must obey the order, and at once, that forced her into the action from which her fearful spirit shrank as

from a plunge into a sea of unknown depth. She was too much used to obeying to be able to resist, and Penrose was a pillar of strength, to which she clung in the overwhelming flood of her fears. She felt as if she were in a dream, a sort of nightmare from which she longed to awaken into the commonplace calm which satisfied her best. Everything was unreal : the hurried journey from the quiet south country lodgings whither they had drifted ; the arrival in the misty dusk of the December evening at the crowded station ; the large, sombre, forbidding house, which seemed vast to her unaccustomed eyes ; the civil, but curious servants ; Mr. Grey, full of fussy, shy, confused kindness and agitation ; the business-like, grave doctor ; the calm, indifferent nurse, so used to mysteries and tragical scenes that nothing surprised or disturbed her ; finally, the sick-room itself, and the unconscious yellow mask that stood for her husband,

for the man Richard Trevenna, that she used to know, that she used to love ; that still breathing but already half-dead figure, that terrified and yet pierced her with a kind of wild sorrow—all was strange and awful, like the dreaded visions that come at night.

She did not know what she did ; she forgot the strange faces of people who wondered at her coming. She was only conscious of the awfulness of death, and of a sudden passion of regret for the past that had closed on all her share in Richard Trevenna's life ; for the love that once had been, and need not have been killed long ago but for him. She found herself close to his pillow, crying to him in a voice no one would have recognized as hers, that was new even in her own ears ; crying to him to say one word—to say good-bye only—for she was his wife, he knew she was his wife ! She beat, as it were, at the gates of his unconscious remoteness. But

he never opened his half-shut eyes, he never heard or answered her. The past was past, the love was dead, the right was null and void. His wife only in name, deserted, forgotten, uncared for ; yet, for the moment tossed into a storm of regretful tenderness for the man who had thus cruelly used her, she bent, sobbing but tearless, in a vain appeal for that which was never to be hers, unless some day, when both might be changed into new life, and he might look at her with other eyes and claim her his. Her emotion carried her out of her dread of the strange, wondering people round her ; they faded into the background. She was only conscious of her own identity with the old Mary Chegwidden who, long ago, had loved this dying man, already dead to any sensation. Let them wonder, let them listen ; what were they to her but shadows, misty and unreal !

“ Richard ! Richard Trevenna ! Listen

to me—listen to me, I say! Come back a moment, dear, and remember your poor Molly, your wife—your Molly Chegwid-den! You might get better, mightn't you? and let me try and be something like I used to be a long while ago. You *did* call me your darling Molly, your pretty one, then—you know you did! And I'm your wife, remember; your wife, and never to have one kind word from you to keep—never one word! It does seem hard—oh, it does seem hard! And I don't want you to die, Richard!”

These were the incoherent and broken sentences, cut in pieces by a childish and helpless sobbing, which the poor woman poured out, forgetful of any hearers, in a confused delirium of utterly futile grief and longing.

Utterly futile! Too late to reach the deaf ear, and the *heart* of Richard Trevenna had been deaf to her for more than twenty years. If the one woman he had

loved with the passion of the senses and the possession of the soul had been in Mary's place, and had kissed his haggard face, she even could not have won him back for a moment's conscious knowledge. He had loved, and been loved ; had betrayed, and been deceived ; had suffered a dragging torment for barren and bitter years ; now neither love, hate, pity, remorse, nor forgiveness could reach him any more. The mists wrapped him, and the mists would pass into the blank of darkness that we call Death.

As his wife cried out unconsciously upon him, some one came to her and clasped her. She vaguely recognized the firm, strong clasp, the warm, beating young heart against which she turned and hid her tearful face ; and, though nothing was quite real to her, she knew that it was the familiar voice of her child, soft and full with the deep tenderness of an intense sympathy, that whispered to her some

broken words of love and consolation. She felt, too, in her confused, formless way, that the love and the sorrow were for *her* alone; that this daughter of them both had none, could have none for the father who had abandoned her. It seemed an additional pang that it should be so, and made the grief that had overpowered her for the moment greater, because more lonely. There was nobody to believe in it. It was an unreasonable, illogical feeling, yet a real one, sweeping away the years of silence and utter alienation, and bringing her face to face with the passion of her long-past girlhood. Penrose coaxed her mother, by tender degrees, out of the room; one of the staring, much-interested servants showed them the bed-chamber prepared for the strange guest. Once there, the girl put her mother gently into the great cushioned chair by the fire, and, kneeling by her, soothed and caressed her into calm. She herself had hardly

glanced at Mr. Trevenna. She had been too full of her mother to have any room for a feeling for him—not even for that resentment which she had borne in her heart towards him before for her mother's past. One can bear no enmity to the dying; the awful pathos and sublimity of it lays its cold, forbidding hand on our earthly passions, and presses them out of sight. He had spoilt and shamed her mother's life, had left her to loneliness, to an existence poor in most essentials, secret and shut out from the best joys of womanhood; but he had been himself also poor, starved, and miserable. Her one glance at his pinched, worn, and haggard face had told her this, and, though late, he had repented somewhat of that old wrong. If only she had had but one sweet memory of her father! But that was amongst the many things denied her.

The warmth of the fire, the comfort of physical rest, the relief of her tears,

and her daughter's ministrations, gradually soothed Mrs. Trevenna into a passive, languid calm. She no longer wept or trembled ; her poor, tired head fell back against the soft cushions that supported it, and her heavy, reddened eyelids fell over her eyes. A sort of half-sleep came over her—Nature's remedy for the violent agitation which had almost completely exhausted her feeble powers. The quiet, staid, respectable cook-housekeeper came to see what was wanted ; and Penrose ventured, almost humbly, to ask for tea to be brought there. They seemed like strangers and interlopers in the house ; but the servants had received strict orders from Mr. Grey to treat Mrs. and Miss Trevenna, as he called them distinctly, with every possible respect. He had briefly told Mrs. Smithson that this lady was her master's wife ; he left the servants' hall to any further explanation or conjecture they liked.

Presently there was that vague stir, that sort of subdued, solemn bustle through the house so significant of the last change. The bedroom door was quietly opened and shut, the servants were heard to exclaim under their breath, one or two of them were crying; the nurse, by Mr. Grey's orders, went softly to tell Mrs. Trevenna that "it was all over—quite quietly, a minute or two ago;" the doctor had a few directions to give, a few last words to say; the blinds were pulled down with dismal precision in every window of the house. The death-chamber was given up for the time to the last offices. Mr. Grey went downstairs to his friend's library, where they had spent so many hours together. Everything was as Mr. Trevenna left it, only a week ago; the volume he had been reading was still on the ledge beside his lounge-chair, every corner was full of the individuality of the dead man.

Edmund Grey stood by the door which he had closed behind him, gazing sadly about him, Richard Trevenna's one mourner, or at least his one intimate—for the wife whom he had cared nothing for was also for the moment a mourner—the one creature in all the world who had really *loved*, and who would miss the man who was gone. He went slowly forward at last, groping his way in a dim sort of fashion, for his eyes were blurred, towards the familiar hearth, and sat down in his old place near to the lounge, where he seemed still to see the long, thin form stretched at length. Fancy reproduced it. He seemed again to hear the harsh, melancholy tones that had now and then softened for him; he could almost have believed he actually heard the old greeting, "Well, Edmund!" with his bodily ears. His grey head drooped sadly forward over his clasped hands—he was inwardly praying for the soul of his

friend, longing to follow it with intercession and pleading to the very throne of God. His faithful heart had never changed, never wavered in its love for Richard Trevenna, though his scrupulous conscience had often condemned his actions, and a great, aching, desolate sense of loss was all that he could feel as yet. There was much to do, he knew; many hard tasks to undertake for the sake of that old friendship—but he must give an hour to brooding grief, and to the stillness of memory. He would not be found wanting afterwards.

Later on in the evening, a message was brought to Mrs. Trevenna's room from Mr. Grey, who asked if she felt able and willing to see him. Penrose had persuaded her mother to go to bed, and she was falling into a heavy sleep. She went to the door to say this, and that if Mr. Grey wished it, she would come down and see him.

Accordingly she was shown to the library, where Mr. Grey received her with a shy, distracted sort of gentleness, that drove away all her own embarrassment. It was always her instinct to help people, and he could not have chosen a better way of putting her at ease with him. He offered her a chair eagerly, with an old-fashioned courtesy, seated himself at a little distance, and looked at her with his dim, soft, short-sighted gaze, that had something of the appealing innocence of a child's.

"Your—your poor mother is—is better, I hope?" he began, stammering and clasping his nervous hands together. "I am glad to hear she is likely to—to sleep. It has been a—a—a painful—a trying scene for her as well as for—for all of us."

"Yes," Penrose said, in a low voice, looking at him with her grave, honest, straightforward glance, "it has been hard for her. And for *you*," she added quickly,

as she took in the signs of trouble in his kind, plain face. "I suppose it is a great loss to you."

Mr. Grey was not observant, people easily deceived his optimistic and charitable nature; but he could not miss the open reading of Penrose's character. Looking into those clear eyes of hers, he seemed to know her in a moment to be brave, true, and loyal; yes, and kind, too, for she was grieved for his grief. She was able to look at it from another point of view than that which affected herself. His heart warmed and opened to her. He felt that they might be friends.

"Yes," he answered simply, losing his stammer and confusion; "he was my old friend, my dear friend. Nothing can make up the loss to me. When one is getting near sixty, one is slow to make friendships, and even when one does, they are not like the old intimacies. But never

mind about me ; I want to put things right for your mother and for you as much as I can. You know that Mrs. Trevenna is mistress here now ? My friend has left it so."

"Has he ?" Penrose said, and no more ; but she sighed heavily.

"It is a responsibility, a trouble—you are feeling that, Miss Trevenna ?" he said, somehow guessing at her thought.

"Yes, I am. It cannot be helped ; but I wish it had not happened. We should be happier without. But please, Mr. Grey"—as she spoke she coloured deeply, and as the crimson rushed over her pale face, Mr. Grey was startled into thinking it almost beautiful ; before it had seemed to him only strong and good—"please do not call me *that*——"

"Not Miss Trevenna ? I thought you had taken the name !"

"I suppose I have—I suppose I must ; but it does not seem to belong to me.

If you do not mind, I should be glad if you would call me Penrose."

"My dear," he said, in a fatherly way, stretching out his hand, "I will call you whatever you wish. And you and I will be friends, will we not?"

"How kind you are!" Penrose said gratefully. "I shall be so glad. Mother and I have hardly a friend in the world."

"Well, henceforth, you have me, you may reckon on me. I'm but a poor, shambling, stupid sort of old fellow, I'm afraid, but I will do my best for you; I can assure you, at least, of that. I have been thinking over things, how best to smooth the way for you. Nobody knows, or need know anything beyond the fact that your mother is Mr. Trevenna's widow, that they have lived apart. He has—he had—a name for eccentricity, so that no one, I dare say, will be much surprised after the first. He has left her Redwood, with a sufficient income for

her life, and to you afterwards. She will at once take possession. The person most affected is Richard's nephew, Geoffrey Trevenna."

"Geoffrey Trevenna!"

The exclamation surprised Mr. Grey, who looked at her questioningly.

"Do you know the name?"

"Yes. I have heard it. I beg your pardon for interrupting."

"I was going to say that I regret very much the fact that Geoffrey, who has always considered himself his uncle's heir, should have been kept in the dark. I must tell him, of course, as soon as I see him."

"He is coming, then?"

"Of course, we sent at once. He was not in London, or he would have come by now."

"He will be much disappointed?"

"I am afraid he will. He ought to have been prepared; but his uncle was

dissatisfied with him, and would not tell him of the change in his intentions. It cannot be helped. Geoffrey will have enough to live upon, and your mother and you have a nearer claim."

Penrose sighed again; but she did not speak. Her sense of justice agreed with what he said. She did believe that her mother had a nearer claim on the dead man, from the very wrong he had done her, than any one else; yet the burden of it was heavy, and the satisfaction it brought had nothing of pleasure in it. She could not feel as if she should ever be able to find any happiness in Redwood or in her inheritance of the goods of the father who had neither known nor cared for her. The cottage and the liberty of the old life were what she longed for all the while. Nothing would ever make a worldling of Penrose. She had lived too much out of the fever and the fret, too inward and unconventional a life. The

one only consolation in it all was in the sudden promise of a new friendship with this gentle, sympathetic, confiding nature that had frankly stretched out a right hand of fellowship to the lonely girl.

It was strange to her, but wonderfully comforting, to find that he seemed to have no suspicions, no misgivings with regard to them, but to accept them frankly, not as interlopers or usurpers, but as those who came armed with full rights; that, in short, he was *on their side*, though it was evident that he had plenty of sympathy with Geoffrey Trevena, and regret for his disappointment. In truth, the simple-hearted, transparent Edmund Grey had been utterly impressed with the strong conviction of Penrose's truth. Her birth, her bringing up, might be against her. Of the latter he knew nothing; but somehow or other she had trodden down all such obstacles. Whatever had made her what she was, he would have staked his life on

her high-mindedness and nobility. It was impossible for any one who was good and true to meet that straight, fearless glance of her large, clear grey eyes and not to recognize this. And she felt at once at home with him. On her side, she had never had young friends, never any of the light-hearted comradeship of her own generation. Her few friends had all been middle-aged or elderly people. With these and with little children she found it more easy to get on, and was more herself. Without being exactly shy—she had no self-consciousness which prevented this—or at all awkward, she was apt to be silent and rather abrupt with girls of her own age, and she had never in her whole life had either a friend or admirer amongst young men. She knew absolutely nothing of them except as a looker-on at the distant flirtations and flutters which never came near enough to her to do more than just amuse her. She had led a maiden

life, outside of the ordinary emotions and joys of ordinary youth ; and, though she might have had her silent dreams and fancies, she scarcely knew the alphabet of what makes often the whole language of a girl's existence. If she ever longed for a different life she felt almost ashamed ; her whole idea of it was austere and difficult. She supposed she was not born to be one of those people who breathe in love and sweetness in the very atmosphere that surrounds them, one like that pretty, delicate Viola, who—it was wonderfully strange to know—was betrothed to this Geoffrey Trevenna, whom they had despoiled.

How he would hate them ! This thought suddenly pricked and hurt Penrose like a stab at her heart. She did not want to begin upon her new world with any hatred or sense of wrong. Perhaps something might be done ; but her stern sense of right forbade the thought of

abandoning the inheritance which she believed *ought* to be hers. Yet she felt as if she could not bear the idea of Geoffrey Trevenna's hatred. He would make Viola despise her, perhaps, and the remembrance of Viola was so pleasant and bright it was almost a misery to fancy it. After all, they had so much ; she had nothing—for that detestable money went for nothing in Penrose's imagination—they might well afford to be generous. They had love, joy, all the sweet things of life. They surely need not hate her for coming between him and his inheritance of Redwood. She dreaded seeing him, she dreaded the next day, and all the days that were to be, and she should have to face the brunt of all, for her mother had completely succumbed for the time. Strong emotion, when once it seized on her weak lymphatic constitution, had a curious physical effect upon her, half benumbing her, depriving her of all energy of thought

or action, making her dull, drowsy, passive as a baby. She had no desire to get up, to do anything. She was not ill ; she ate and drank what was given her, submitted to seeing and giving orders to the dress-maker, was very meek and obedient to Mrs. Smithson, who patronized her in the calmest manner, and perfectly docile with Penrose ; but she was obstinate in one respect—she would stay in her room, she would not see Mr. Grey or Mr. Hamley, and still less Geoffrey Trevenna. “ Penrose would do it,” “ Penrose knows,” was her mechanical answer to everything ; and Penrose, with all her fears and anxieties, was forced to stand quite alone and face the crowd of new responsibilities and the new and painful duties that met her all at once like an army.





CHAPTER II.

GEOFFREY TREVENNA was a regular man of the world, and emphatically a man of pleasure—that is to say, he had deliberately and consistently chosen the sunny side of the way, invariably ignoring the shadows, the darker paths of life; it does not mean that his tastes were dissolute or vicious. He did not make a high moral principle of it, but, being of a refined and squeamish temper, infinitely preferred the finer enjoyments to the coarser; champagne and burgundy to porter; pretty women of society to the lower stratum; ladies to barmaids or ballet girls; operettas to music halls; the higher

sort of clubs to gambling hells ; educated people and well-written books to anything low, vulgar, or disgusting. But he persistently shunned and hated all the disagreeable inevitables of existence, the ugly facts of poverty, disease, tragedy, and death. He did not see what was to be gained by making one's self wretched, that did no one any good. There were plenty of people in deadly earnest who were supreme bores ; they might fight the battles that were necessary—some even seemed to prefer being uncomfortable and leading a life of perpetual warfare. He should only make a fool of himself if he “went in for good works.”

Unfortunately enough he found the whole course of events at this time exactly opposite to what he desired. He braced himself—for he was not a soft effeminate fool—to bear the whole disgusting business in as calm, gentlemanly, and philosophic a frame of mind as good taste directed.

Beyond this philosophy he could not go ; “good form” took the place of high moral sentiment. It was in the first place distinctly painful to him to know that his uncle was dead ; it was not a great grief, yet he was sorry, in his way.

Of late years Mr. Trevenna had been caustic, irritable, complaining, hard to please ; but when Geoffrey was a boy he had reason to remember many kindnesses, the liberality which delights a lad in his teens and an easy-going *bonhomie* which had, while the mood lasted, made his uncle Dick a fascinating companion. He had introduced him to many delightful amusements, had stood treat in holiday times for magnificent entertainments, beginning with elysian feasts at French restaurants and ending with all the joys of the theatre. Geoffrey had cherished the remembrance of a week in Paris for years. At those times he had really *loved* his munificent, indulgent uncle ;

he had never *disliked* him, even at his worst.

He would have been glad had his life been prolonged indefinitely, only without the ill health and pain which had embittered the last two years of it. It hurt him to think that he was dead, and dead after so dreary a time of hopeless waiting for the end. But it hurt still more to know the truth that came upon him with the suddenness of a thunderclap that this death had not the compensations which would have made it still a pain, a regret, but with every prospect of speedy consolation. He had not wished for his uncle's death—he was honestly free from this meanness—but he had expected that it would have its compensating side. He had looked forward to the prospect of owning Redwood and a good income without any hurry or eagerness to come into its possession, yet with decided satisfaction in the contemplation of it in the

future. The lazy, agreeable life of a country gentleman would just suit him as he grew middle-aged. He might give up his fitful attempts at getting on in his profession, his occasional attacks of work; would marry and settle down into a hunting, well-bred, comfortable English squire, more advanced in views and with larger interests than the majority to give a zest to the life. It would just suit his charming, lovely, popular little Viola! His castles in the air had been pretty and agreeable visions of ease, sufficiency, pleasant society, with an excursion now and then into Bohemia to give the whole a piquant variety of flavour. Now a sudden downfall had overtaken the airy fabric—he was no longer the heir, the future owner of Redwood. He was ousted by a couple of women who were probably of the adventuress class, who had somehow succeeded not only in cajoling his uncle into this tardy act of

restitution or whatever they had persuaded him to regard it, but had even induced "good old Grey" to treat them with as much respect as if this trumped-up marriage had been the most orthodox affair of bygone years. But it was not difficult to get round Edmund Grey. Any specious woman could do that with a small display of diplomatic pathos. Well, at any rate, he had got his work cut out. He must not seem to care, he must hide all show of disgust or chagrin, he must be civil to this "Mrs. Trevenna" and her daughter, whatever inward disgust it might cause him. It was a good thing that he had never been in the habit of taking the world into his confidence.

He went through all the unpleasant details that seemed expected of him on his arrival, interviewed Mr. Hamley, Dr. Brett, the housekeeper, submitted even to the latter's urgent wish for him to see her "poor dear master," who was already laid

in that last cold, narrow, ghastly bed, at which living humanity shudders. Geoffrey gave one momentary glance—*this* was one of the hateful facts from which his whole nature recoiled in shivering disgust; but for the sacrifice to convention, which acted on him as a strong force, he would never have set foot in that ice-cold, horrible chamber of death. There were flowers, chrysanthemums, hot-house blooms of delicate white, laid about; these only emphasized the dread reality with a mocking contrast. What had their frail, white, faint sweetness and purity, to do with the dead man, whose life had been neither sweet nor gentle, whose haggard frame was prematurely old, wasted and worn with the weary struggles of a complex and inharmonious nature? It was meant for kindness, for respect; but to Geoffrey's mind they only brought in another element of discord. He went hastily out, in spite of Mrs. Smithson's reproachful and solemn

gaze, which accused him of disrespect. Outside the door, as she closed it after her, he paused a moment to ask her, in an abrupt, yet shaken voice—for he still shuddered at the impression of that glance at the dead, stern face—where Mrs. Trevenna was.

“She’s in bed, Mr. Geoffrey; much upset. Miss Trevenna is with her.”

“In bed! Then I shan’t see her to-day?”

“No, sir; I presume not. She seems a good deal exhausted.”

“And Miss Trevenna?”

“I suppose she will be down presently, Mr. Geoffrey.”

No more passed; Mrs. Smithson was excessively guarded, dry, remote. She had determined to take no side, to be neutral and inaccessible. Events would decide on her future course. If this new mistress proved easy and accommodating, it was possible that she might keep her comfortable situation; if not, it was always

open to her to try another. *Mrs. Smithsons* did not need to go a-begging.

In her secret heart, however, the good woman espoused the cause of the deposed Geoffrey, the pleasant, handsome, lively young fellow, whom she had known as a mischievous schoolboy, such as her kind delight in, who had always been "full of his fun" with her, as well as free with his purse. She "liked lads best," and was not at all pleased with the new position of affairs. Only her own interests must be considered first and foremost, therefore the displeasure had to be concealed under the solemn appearance of respectful aloofness.

Geoffrey went downstairs slowly, and through the empty, neat, desolate-looking rooms. The dining-room, with its dark oak furnishing, and gilt leather walls, sombre enough, with its rows of chairs placed mathematically against the panels ; his uncle's silver cup, won at some race at

college, stood on the sideboard, it gave Geoffrey a new kind of pang to think how often he had seen it in the hand that now lay so cold and passive amidst the mockery of the white flowers. There were the old pictures that Mr. Trevenna valued, one or two Old Masters bought at sales, the portrait of his own father, Harry Trevenna, painted in his gay youth. The drawing-room was not quite so painful to look at as either dining-room or library, because less full of memories ; it was a bachelor's drawing-room, rather pretty, but stiff, un-lived in. Here there was a bonny fire. Geoffrey drew an armchair close to the hearth, and let the warmth creep over and comfort him.

It was getting dusk. Mr. Grey had gone home, having some urgent afternoon engagement ; Mr. Hamley had returned to town, but would, of course, be back for the funeral ; the whole house was full of nothing but silence, which brooded over

it as the low, grey sky brooded over the damp, shivering earth. The servants' apartments were out of earshot; the occasional restless bark of the yard dog, the fall of the cinders, and the tick of the clock were the only sounds that broke the stillness. Mr. Trevenna had had no house pets; his old terrier had died some years ago, and his loss had been so painful to his master's melancholy and morbid temperament, that he had never replaced him. "Why should he keep animals to grow old and die, and make him miserable?" he asked. It seemed as if there were nothing but dreary solitude in the place, Geoffrey thought.

When he was thoroughly warmed it became intolerable to sit still and think. He got up to ring for lights, to look for a book, when the door suddenly opened, his uncle's man brought in the tea-tray—meals go on whether people live or die, as if routine were the only thing immortal—and

proceeded to light the reading lamp on a table near. Almost at the same moment a girl, carrying a small tray—a tall, straight, slender girl, in a dark blue serge dress, with a pale, grave face—came in through the half-open door. It startled Geoffrey so much to see her, as it were, at home, in this wifeless, daughterless room, that for the moment he could not realize who it was, and stared at her blankly. As he took her in more and more, an odd consciousness came over him that he recognized, had seen her somewhere, and his mind groped after the connection of ideas to tell him where. He lighted suddenly upon the clue; she again reminded him, as she had done when she stopped Viola's ponies, of that picture of Britomart.

Was *this* the girl whom he had been reviling in his own mind? Was this his uncle's unclaimed, ignored daughter—his own kith and kin, though the law gave her no rights of blood? The reality was

marvellously unlike his idea of her. She started, too, at meeting a stranger face to face in this sudden way ; she had not been told that Geoffrey Trevenna had come. A rush of colour came into her face, but she met his eyes with her usual direct and fearless courage. Geoffrey thought he had never seen a woman so utterly devoid of any remote trace of self-consciousness. They stared at each other as frankly and searchingly as if there was no question of sex between them, nothing but a mutual desire for knowledge. Then, almost inclined to laugh inwardly, though laughing had been far enough away from him a minute ago, with his mouth curved into an open and irresistible smile, Geoffrey came to meet her, and held out his hand. Had she expected a declaration of war ? It almost seemed so, for her face altered all at once as he greeted her, the slight sternness of her mouth and forehead relaxed, her eyes warmed and softened.

She lost the boyish "knight-errant" expression, and was a girl again.

"You must be my new cousin," he said unhesitatingly, and with a courtesy that was almost friendliness. "I am Geoffrey Trevenna."

Penrose was melted and touched to the heart by the words and tone. They won her for ever, for, once given, she never withdrew her friendship. She had expected to meet some one who might veil his dislike and contempt for her mother and her—for their interests were inseparable—but who must be at heart a foe, and she had been greeted as a friend, as a kinswoman. The strain suddenly relaxed—she had been nerving herself all the time to the highest pitch of fortitude and endurance—she could have sobbed out her gratitude to him. She could only let what she felt shine in her large eyes, bright with unshed tears. The servant had left the room, in his quiet

indifferent way, leaving everything neatly arranged for tea. The room suddenly looked homelike and cheerful; Penrose felt warm, almost happy, her heart expanded—she dropped the yoke which she had been carrying heavily those long, long dreary two days.

“I am Penrose,” she said, beginning to make some little womanly preparations for her mother’s meal, as she turned away after they had shaken hands. “It is very kind of you to call me your cousin.”

It was an odd, unconventional sort of beginning; the whole personality of the girl was a surprise to Geoffrey, yet he felt as if he could not help trusting, even liking her. Her identity with the “Britomart” who had saved Viola from that threatened accident, and then vanished before he could thank her, somehow seemed a guarantee for her good faith. It was the oddest freak of nature that she should be the child of illicit love,

she who carried the very stamp of honour and nobility on her open brow, but to suspect or despise her was an impossibility.

"I have seen you before," he said, still looking at her with a half-amused investigation. "It is an odd coincidence—do you remember where?"

"No—I don't think I do," Penrose answered, turning and pausing to consider. "Yet somehow—I am not sure——"

"Don't you remember stopping a pair of runaway ponies last spring, with a young lady in the carriage? We were, or seemed horribly ungrateful; but you had disappeared before I had time to thank you. It was a wonderfully brave thing to do—you were far prompter, and more courageous than any *man* in the crowd."

Penrose's face cleared with the sudden light his words cast on her perplexity. "To be sure!" she cried eagerly. "It *was* you, and that lady was the Viola—

the Miss Field—I met at St. Par’s; she told me she was engaged to you!”

“It is strange enough, in all conscience—the whole affair. So *you* are the Miss Trevenna that Viola told me was painting on the beach, and to whom she talked. You must let me thank you now, since I did not—was not able to then. I did not forget it. I often thought that I had never seen anything so quickly, bravely done.”

“It was nothing,” Penrose said a little brusquely, and colouring; “anybody could have done it.”

“Only anybody *did* not. Won’t you sit down, and have some tea? I am afraid your mother is not well.”

“No, thank you; I must take it to her first. She is awake now—she is not very well, and has been sleeping a good while.”

“When you have taken it to her, will you come back and have some with me?”

It is a dreary, still house, and I was feeling particularly cheerless."

"If you wish it I will," she said, hesitating a little, and looking at him earnestly, as if to be sure that he meant what he said.

"I do wish it very much," he returned. "After this curious introduction to each other, we ought surely to make friends."

"Then I will come back directly," she said briefly but cordially, and the brightness of a smile came into her eyes, though her lips were serious; "but don't wait, for I shall have to stay some minutes." She took up her little tray, which she had prepared with elaborate nicety, and was gone in a moment.

Penrose found her mother a little revived by her long sleep, but still looking white, weary, and forlorn enough. She put the pillows comfortably for her, coaxed her to sit up, eat, and drink, and brought a new atmosphere of hope and

revival in with her. Her mother stared at her with a blank kind of wonder.

“You look quite bright, Pen,” she said almost reproachfully, “I don’t know what has made you.”

“Geoffrey Trevenna is here, mother darling,” the girl said, sitting on the bed beside her, and waiting tenderly on her languid weakness; “he is so kind and friendly—he does not seem to hate us—it is a great relief.”

“Mr. Geoffrey Trevenna is here! Oh, when shall I have to see him, Pen? I am so nervous—so afraid—I wish I need never go down and face anything any more.”

“Dear darling, there’s nothing to be afraid of—really nothing! You *must* try and be brave. You must get up and come down to-morrow. Mother, you will go through with it, won’t you? I shall be with you, I will help you; and they are all kind, really kind. I told you how

good and gentle Mr. Grey was; Mr. Hamley is cold, but quite polite and considerate; and the one person I dreaded, this Geoffrey Trevenna, is friendly—he called me his cousin—I had not expected it. I am sure he will be nice to you.”

“I am glad it is better than we feared, Mrs. Trevenna murmured in her plaintive, drawling voice. “I wish I felt braver—I always wish I were not so weak and foolish, Pen; but I can’t really help it. I grow worse and worse, as I get older and less strong.”

Penrose stooped and kissed her silently, with fervent tenderness.





CHAPTER III.

HIS helpless little Viola had trained Geoffrey in all kinds of service to ladies, and Penrose, who was as unused to such tendance, as if she had been a man, was half amused, half touched, wholly surprised to find, when she returned to the drawing-room, that the tea had been kept hot for her, and the plate of buttered cake was also hot and savoury, that a low chair was drawn to the side of the fire with a little table beside it, and that instead of standing to help herself carelessly to anything that might be going, which was her way of getting her own

tea, she was expected to sit in lazy luxury and be waited upon in a calm, unfussy, natural manner that did not oppress her. Unused to society as she was, her innate nobility of character and refinement of thought, though it did not prevent a certain abrupt sincerity which might be called brusque, an uncompromising straightforwardness of speech, prevented real awkwardness or rudeness. She could not be easy within artificial bounds of convention, however, and must go straight as a lance to the heart of things. So now she startled him by her directness, as, after she had finished her tea, she asked suddenly whether he knew all about her mother and herself. It seemed as if she were afraid of receiving even small kindnesses from him till she was quite sure that he realized the position in which they stood. There was something Quixotic, something of a challenge in her look and voice—he understood it,

while he wondered at her with an amusement that was not disrespectful.

“Yes, I think so,” he answered slowly, his lazy but observant dark Spanish eyes scanning her face, which was a book in which it was easy to read. “Mr. Grey explained things to me pretty clearly. Of course I was surprised to find that my uncle had a wife—and a daughter.”

“But, you know——” Penrose began, and a flood of painful crimson spread to the very roots of her hair. It was suddenly horribly difficult to her to speak, for in a moment she had sprung, as it were, upon the consciousness that she was talking to a young man, and that she was a girl alone with him. She could not tell what had thus come upon her, something in those dark, penetrating, half-sarcastic eyes. “You know, I have really no right—no legal right. He, Mr. Trevenna, wished me to take that name; but it does not seem to belong to me. I shall be

glad if you do not mind calling me Penrose ; that is the only one I seem to have any right to. My mother was not a lady born, only a poor Cornish girl. You must feel that we are interlopers. Before you came I thought that you must hate and despise us."

"I hope you don't think that now, Miss—well, then, Penrose"—as she made a gesture of distaste. "I am not at all inclined to hate or despise you. Of course I feel that my poor uncle has treated me a little hardly ; but I dare say he looked at it from another point of view, and besides, he was angry with me."

"Was he ? Why ?"

"Well, for more than one reason, I dare say. He thought I neglected him, and he disliked my engagement with Miss Field."

"He disliked that ? But why should he ? No one could dislike *her*, she is so pretty, so sweet and charming."

Geoffrey's heart warmed to this new, strange cousin of his. After all, it might have been worse. Perhaps his uncle had left him more than he feared, and Penrose would be Viola's friend and adorer.

"Thank you," he said, smiling at her. His handsome nonchalant face, which was a little cynical in repose, was fascinating when he smiled, as many a girl had known before now. "I am grateful to you for having found that out. But my uncle gave himself no chance of doing so. He hated her father and the connection. Oh, it's all right! I am not going to make a row. I am disappointed—that is inevitable—and you are too fond of truth, I see, to wish me to pretend that I am not."

"Oh yes! Don't let there be any pretence. I want you to know what I really feel, and that we should understand each other. I *do* believe that it was right and just at the last to acknowledge my

mother, and to give her what was due to her, and therefore I feel that we ought to take this ; but, indeed, it is true that it brings no happiness. I would change places with any penniless girl whose father had cared for her, and who could love his memory !”

Geoffrey was convinced, against himself, or against the worldly part of himself, that she spoke the truth, yet he was sure that if any third person had told him that she had expressed an entire indifference to her new position he should have been sceptical of her sincerity. It was simply impossible to doubt her ; her voice had the ring of truth ; there was no sham in the sadness that lay in her eyes, which had tears not far from them.

“It was a pity,” he said rather hesitatingly, for the subject was not an easy one to discuss, “that he did not know you ; it might have been happier for him.”

“I am not sure. I should never have

cared for him if I knew everything I know now. I could have forgiven—I *did* forgive him when I saw him dead—there were such marks of suffering on his face, as if he was used to hurting himself as well as other people—but I am all my mother's child ; she has been with me, has cared for me always. I could not pretend to mourn for him !”

“Could you pretend at all ?” Geoffrey said, with a slight smile. “I fancy not. Well, as for me, fortunately I needn't sham. He was very good to me when I was a boy ; one doesn't forget that. I *am* sorry the poor old man is dead.”

“I am glad there are some people to be sorry,” Penrose said wistfully. “To go out of life without leaving a regret—that is terrible.”

“My uncle leaves more than one. Mr. Grey was his faithful, devoted friend from first to last. His death means a great deal to Grey.”

"Mr. Grey is a good man. I don't think any one could have a kinder face and voice."

"Ay. When Grey was made all the vinegar was left out of the salad. He is what Shelley calls 'hateless.' I believe it often vexed my uncle that he could not make him despise and detest, as he had a talent for doing. Grey's soul got into a man's body by mistake; it ought to have belonged to a particularly womanly woman. And yours, surely," he added to himself, as he perused Penrose's open face unobserved, "should properly have been a man's. You have the face of a mediæval knight of chivalry, and could break a spear or two for the defenceless, if need be."

They sank into silence, each contemplating the near future, Geoffrey with the despondency natural to the downfall of all his confident visions.

Penrose looked about her, her eyes resting on one unfamiliar object after

another. She wondered whether it could be true that this was to be her home—this strange, cold, alien place, which to her, accustomed to the small, plain cottage at Copsley, looked grand and almost gorgeous. She sighed heavily at last, and said abruptly—

“I suppose we shall have to live at Redwood.”

“I suppose so,” Geoffrey returned, with a suspicion of coldness in his tone. It provoked him to hear her sigh and speak as if what to him had seemed a consummation chiefly to be desired were a misfortune. “You won’t find that a hard fate. It’s a comfortable, jolly old house, the gardens are very pretty, and there’s a nice neighbourhood.”

“*Jolly!*” she repeated, in a surprised tone; and again her eyes wandered round what looked to her so coldly strange and uninviting. “A *jolly* house! It doesn’t seem that to me.”

He laughed. "Well, I own it sounds rather foolish. To-day the place is sombre and dreary enough; but I've been jolly here. I dare say you'll get to like it, in time."

"If only I *belonged* to it! But we don't—we never shall."

"My dear cousin, why not? Never's a long day. You'll fit in all right some time."

She shook her head, but said nothing. Perhaps her real thoughts embodied in words might have taxed his belief in her sincerity, for she was wishing that Redwood were his.

She did not dispute the *justice* of her mother's claims on Richard Trevenna. He had done right, if tardily, she believed, in his efforts to restore some of the things of which he had despoiled the woman who ought to have borne his name long ago, only it all implied a new and heavy burden.

To have had enough to live on, her mother's name clear from stain, and to be free to choose some cottage out of the world, this was her ideal of happiness. It was not, however, Penrose's way to sink under a burden; her strong young shoulders were ready to bear anything laid upon them; there was plenty of the fighting instinct in her. Did it come from the soldier Trevenna ancestors, or from the old Cornish seafaring men who had braved so many a stormy sea, and gone fearlessly out into unknown waters in the days of Queen Bess? Perhaps it was a pity that Penrose was not born a man, but not if it be true, as the wise say, that women have to learn to be brave, and men pure. And, after all, there was a woman's heart of strong deep tenderness and passionate pity beating under the plain dark bodice that had no ornamentation to set off such favours as nature had bestowed upon her, all of which Geoffrey was quick to note.

His new cousin was not beautiful, yet she had more than one strong point. He saw how thick and soft her light brown hair was, though there was neither gold nor bronze in its colour to brighten it; how nobly it sprung, like the hair of a Greek woman, strong from the roots, round her broad forehead and on her rather large, grandly shaped head. He liked the firm set of the slender throat, the cleft determined chin, the wholesome white of her teeth, which showed little, however, as her mouth was apt to be close shut; but he liked her eyes best. These were the charm emphatically of her face; they were so large, the eyelids well cut, opening frankly, and the colour, though grey without a mixture of blue, green, or hazel, was clear and bright as the first shade of dawning sky before it warms into blue. She was good to look at, though not in the least the woman to charm an ordinary man's taste, to draw the stare of the professional lady-killer, or to

make any one fall instantaneously into love. Yet there was a calm sort of satisfaction, even of pleasure, to be got out of seeing any one so simply harmonious, so healthily clean and pure, that made her attractive just from want of caring to attract. He would never have believed a couple of hours ago that he should be already heartily friendly with the girl whose idea had been repulsive to him, and whose very existence had robbed him of what he had felt to be his by right. He could not help liking her, though she amused him by her complete unconventionality, and her disregard or ignorance of all the ordinary ways of girls.

“She treats me,” he thought, “with the calm comradeship of another fellow; she has no more idea of trying to make me admire or compliment her than if I were an old woman. She has not an *arrière pensée*, not the remotest shade of a suspicion that there is anything at all odd in our mutual

relations. She is the very first good-looking girl I have ever met, whom it is absolutely impossible to associate with the idea of a flirtation. I don't believe there's a man in the world, the most abandoned *roué* that ever lived, who dare insult the calm virginity of the woman—he couldn't stand that look in her eyes. The very last to fall in love with, but one to choose for a downright good friend. And to know all the time that she is the illegitimate daughter of a weak sort of ignorant woman, as that mother of hers must be! Heredity, or chance, or something has played an odd freak in bringing this nature out of that connection."

On her side Penrose's heart expanded with a delightful sense of ease and friendliness. The relief of finding that Geoffrey neither hated nor despised her for the mere fact of her existence, as she had half feared he would, in itself was great ; that she had found a friend in him was happiness. She

was so starved in friendship, her world had held so few, and her affection was so large. It was like looking on at a pretty picture, hearing some sweet idyll, to think of Geoffrey and Viola, now that she knew them both.

Penrose had known nothing first-hand of love or romance, her fancy was free as a child's, but she had her dreams, her illusions, her ideals. She was generously glad to know that there were happy girls in the world, who realized the visions that for her seemed far away and impossible. She was not of them, but she bore no grudge to them for being happier than herself; she had a spirit capable of magnanimity.

Geoffrey and she, therefore, to the inward surprise of both, found themselves talking on freely and confidentially. Penrose had not much to tell of her past, but she had many questions to put as to the future. She told him, with her usual

outspokenness, that neither she nor her mother had the least idea of how to order a large house full of servants, or of the routine and demands of society.

"You will help us, won't you?" she said, looking at him with such confidence in his kindness as touched him. "It will be very difficult, for I suppose it will be quite impossible to go on living here without knowing any one."

"I should say it would. But don't be alarmed at the extent of your acquaintances here. My uncle led a most solitary life. Mr. Grey, Mr. Hamley, Dr. Brett, and very occasionally the vicar, Mr. Underwood, were all the people who were in the habit of visiting here. Mrs. Brett and Mrs. Underwood will call, and a few more ladies, I suppose; but you can be as quiet as you please."

"I am glad of that. But there's one thing I must say, Mr. Trevenna——"

"Come, now, if you are to be *Penrose*

to me, why am I not to be Geoffrey to you ?”

“When I get used to you,” she returned, colouring, but openly, “I shall be glad to call you so ; but it is different now. But what I wanted to say was”— she paused a moment, looked down, and was confused, but struggled to express herself plainly—“I don’t want to let these people, these ladies, get to know us *under false pretences*. Do you understand what I mean ?”

“Perhaps ; but——”

“I mean, not to suppose we are just as they are. It may be that, if they knew all about us, they would rather have nothing to do with us. Yet I can’t bear to think that these strangers need be told things that might make them despise or think ill of my mother. Tell me, will it be wrong, will it be deceitful if we meet them on the same footing as ordinary people, without saying any-

thing of the things that make us unlike them?"

"No, no, certainly not!" Geoffrey answered, a little embarrassed—this new cousin was certainly very unlike any other girl in the world! "You will not be very intimate, I dare say. Why should they know anything but that you are Mrs. and Miss Trevenna, and that my uncle chose to say nothing about your existence? As I said, he had the character for eccentricity which will cover anything."

"And if we should get intimate with anybody, then they might know—if I were *sure* it was not wrong!"

"It will be time enough to proclaim things when you are on really a close footing with any one—if, for instance," he added, audaciously looking straight in her face—"if you were thinking of being married."

Penrose crimsoned, yet she held up her head proudly and bravely, and

met his eyes with her unwavering glance.

“I shall not marry. That will not be one of the things to happen.”

He smiled, and she met the challenge of his incredulous expression.

“You don’t believe me? You think I am talking nonsense? Well, you will see. It does not matter now. I know I must do what I can to spare mother; but I hate the idea of having to meet people who fancy we are as they are.”

“Probably you are fifty times better. I don’t think you need trouble yourself about the question.”

Penrose did not join Mr. Grey and Geoffrey at dinner; she had dined early, she said, as she was used to doing, and would spend the evening upstairs with her mother, whom she had persuaded to sit up by the fire in the large, old-fashioned, comfortable spare room,

which seemed palatial to the simple woman who had never soared above the ideas of Mary Chegwiddden.

"I have been thinking, Pen," she said, in her feeble, pausing, dragging voice, after a silence which had lasted a good while, "about this Mrs. Smithson. She is very kind and all that, but somehow I'm afraid of her. I want, if only I can manage it, for her to go away, and for Jane to be housekeeper. I shall not be happy unless it can be like this. I should always, I know, be frightened at this woman ; she looks so hard at me, as if she were wondering about things, and I'm sure she despises me. Could she go away, do you think, and Jane manage for me?"

"Of course she could, mother. You have a right to have whom you please."

"But I should never dare to tell her she was to go!"

"Shall I then—after a day or two?"

“Hadn’t we better ask Mr. Hamley to settle everything? Lawyers can always manage best. I am afraid of Mr. Hamley, too, but not in the same way; I feel I can just put everything into his hands, and it’s such a comfort that he knows everything. I should like *all* the servants to go, if it isn’t unkind—to have nobody in the house who was with—with *him*, and to get Jane here as soon as possible. Then, I dare say, a cook and housemaid would do.”

Penrose shook her head, half smiling. “Not in this great house, mother; there must be three at least, I am sure.”

“Well, they could be got. Then Jane would manage them all, and take the trouble of things off me. It will be a strange sort of life anyhow, Pen, for you and me. I wish it were not such a big house, and there was not so much money to think about. It makes my head swim

and ache so." She put her hands vaguely to her forehead, and bent forward as if she felt the burden actually laid upon her weak shoulders, her voice quavered into a sobbing sigh.

"You will get used to it, dear," Penrose said tenderly, but with sadness in the glance that rested in a motherly sort of way on the mother who was more like a child to her. "We can be quiet here, and they will all be kind. Yes, it will be best to have Jane."

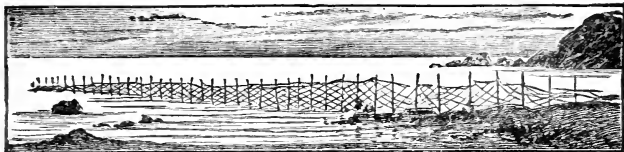
She could not call her "Aunt Jane," even when there was no one by—she had too short a time been used to the relationship. The mere thought of her strong elder sister's presence fortified Mrs. Trevenna; she sat up and said, more cheerfully—

"Yes; if Jane comes, and Mr. Hamley lets Mrs. Smithson and all the servants go, I shall be much better able to get on."

Under this prospect she was able to

enjoy her supper, and to fall placidly asleep, in spite of the dread of the coming day—her husband's funeral day. She lived in the moment as a child does.





CHAPTER IV.

MR. TREVENNA'S funeral passed, as such ceremonies do when few are present, and no one's heart is broken. Only Mr. Hamley, Mr. Grey, and Geoffrey returned for the reading of the will, which was now no surprise to any one.

It was dated the day after the marriage ceremony, and left Redwood, with an income of three thousand pounds, to his wife, Mary Trevenna, for her life, the same to revert to her daughter Penrose, to be called Penrose Trevenna, after her death. There were some legacies—to Mr. Grey, to his servants, to Mr. Hamley, and the sum of eight thousand pounds was

left to his nephew, Geoffrey Trevenna, barrister-at-law, of the Inner Temple.

Eight thousand to a man who had confidently expected a small estate, and at least half that amount as income ! He was, of course, not surprised ; but it was a crushing reverse.

Penrose, to whose unconventional ignorance eight thousand pounds seemed an enormous sum, and who knew that her cousin had already, what seemed to her, a sufficient income, and a profession, did not in the least realize what the facts meant to the man who took the news with a perfectly cool air of philosophy. He was not going to make a fool of himself before anybody. He could take a knock-down blow smiling as well as another.

The next day he was to return to town ; but he thought it well to prepare the mind of his future father-in-law by letter for the reverse of fortune, which would be no small thing to Mr. James Field. He

wrote a short bold, business-like epistle, informing Viola's father of what had happened, and of the appearance on the scene of this unknown wife, who was now Mrs. Trevenna, of Redwood, Oxfordshire, which he had once hoped his wife might be called. To Viola he also wrote as follows :—

“ MY SWEETEST PET,

“ I have written all particulars relating to my uncle's will, and the new relations that have come so unexpectedly to light, to your father, and I need not say much to you of the business part of the affair, which is rather disastrous. It just amounts to this, darling : instead of being in the position to offer you a home, and a very comfortable, if not a very large income, I am left a poor man, barely in possession of six hundred a year, which, for a married pair in London—especially when neither is used to economy—is rather an impossible income. I am afraid, therefore, that it means waiting. I can't, and won't suppose anything worse. I can work myself up in my profession if I try, I've no doubt, and I will try, for my pet's sweet sake ; but I won't ask you to marry me till I can give you the home you ought to have. We'll talk things over on Sunday, when I'll call, and then I can tell you all about my new aunt and cousin ; but one surprising fact I must impart. You already know the

latter, a little, having met and talked with her last spring at St. Par's. Don't you remember being struck by meeting some one of the same name as your slave? She is a good sort, I am constrained to admit this in spite of her crime in depriving me of my uncle's property. Oddly enough, there is nothing of the adventuress about the girl, who is simple, frank, and straightforward to bluntness. She retains a vivid impression of your charms. Good-bye for another two days, darling one.

"Yours only, though, alas, Deschidado (or how do you spell the disinherited one?),

"G. T."

Viola Field was not wont to grace the rather early breakfast which her father was obliged to have, and the morning that Geoffrey's letter arrived only Mr. and Mrs. Field, as usual, were at table. As a rule the master's letters were apt to be what his wife called "uninteresting stuff," and her own invitations, or such like, were more engrossing; but, to-day, she could not help noticing his heavy scowl over one as she passed him his coffee, and in a moment his favourite expletive broke out. Mr. Field was a man who always

“damned” everything on the shortest notice, provided he were not in society. He brought his hand down heavily on the table now, with a growling “Damn Trevenna !”

“Goodness, James, what makes you damn him ?” his wife cried, staring. “Whatever has poor Geoffrey done now ?”

“His uncle’s dead,” began Mr. Field, to be at once interrupted by a—

“Well, I know that. It isn’t his fault—and if he is, what then ?”

“What then ? Why, a devilish fix—a pretty kettle of fish. Here’s a wife and daughter turned up that no one knew anything about—and Geoffrey is cut off with a shilling.”

“Cut off with a shilling ?”

“Yes, that’s to say, what amounts to pretty much the same. Instead of coming in for Redwood and some three or four thousands a year, as he led me to expect,

his uncle leaves nearly everything to this woman, and a paltry eight thousand to his nephew. And I bet it's a great deal the fellow's fault. I always disapproved of that damned engagement, and you would have it."

"A wife and daughter! Mr. Trevenna—that every one thought a confirmed old bachelor! Well, I never!"

"Oh, I knew Trevenna had been no saint—but I never dreamt he'd been such a fool as to *marry*! Well, of course Liddy, there's to be no talk of Viola's having this fellow now."

"Good gracious, James! You talk as if the thing were as easy as breaking a teacup—and I can't think what you want to blame Geoffrey for. If his uncle were cruel, and there are these horrid people in the background, that's no fault of his."

"You women must always make fools of yourselves for a handsome face and

a smooth tongue. Give me some bottom to a man. Here's Geoffrey can't work, can't make money, can't make anything but love. Pah! that sort of thing don't wash."

At that moment Viola's maid entered, to beg her mother to come upstairs. The mother rose at once, regardless of her husband's breakfast or her own. She made no secret at all of the entire subordination of the father to the child. Viola was all the world to her—the one passion in an easy selfish life.

"Mummy," Viola cried, half sobbing, as her mother bent over and kissed her, "have you heard this hateful news about old Mr. Trevenna?"

"Yes, lovey; papa has heard from Geoff. It is a bad piece of work, isn't it? Just to fancy that old bachelor, as everybody thought him, turning out to have a wife! And if he had, what did he mean by leaving Redwood to her?"

I consider Geoff has been abominably treated."

"What does papa say?"

"Well, there's hardly a word passed. I came away to see you. Of course he's upset."

"Yes, it *is* a wretched nuisance. I shan't be able to be married as we hoped at Easter, mummy."

"No, dear; if *that* were the worst, I'd not grumble."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know," her mother began, hesitating, "Geoffrey will be downright poor. You couldn't possibly marry and live in London under an income of at least a thousand, not to be comfortable, or to have things at all in the way you've been used. He won't have much more than half that, perhaps. Papa wouldn't hear of it."

"But he could easily allow me the rest."

"Well, as to that I don't know. He might be able, or he might not; but I'm sure he *wouldn't*."

"Well, then we can wait, that's all. I'm in no hurry."

Viola threw herself back on her pillow. Her mother looked at her fondly, as she constantly did, as if she were a new sight to her. The pretty, flushed, delicate face, the ruffled hair, the over-bright eyes, with the slightly reddened eyelids, struck her with always a fresh sensation, half delight, half anxiety.

"My dearie, have you eaten any breakfast? Not a morsel, I do believe! And you don't look well."

"I didn't want anything to eat. I have a little cold, that's all, mummy; and Geoff's letter upset me rather. I never dreamed there was the least uncertainty about his having old Mr. Trevenna's property."

"No. It *is* an upset. But don't fret,

whatever you do, Vi; you can't stand it. Stay upstairs to-day; it's horribly foggy and cold. I'll ask Dr. Maynard to look round; you have a nasty cough. Don't get up yet, darling. I must go down now, but I'll be back again directly."

"Stop one moment, mummy. I must tell you the oddest thing; this girl, this daughter of Mr. Trevenna, who do you think she turns out to be? Why, that girl I talked to on the beach at St. Par's—the one who sketched so well, and that I took a fancy to."

"Well, to be sure! The world is small! I wish she and her mother didn't exist, anyhow. But you won't fret, Vi, you'll promise me? Things will come right."

This was generally Mrs. Field's comfortable opinion. As a rule things *had* come right with her; she had the flourishing look of a peach grown on the sunniest part of the wall.

“Oh, I won’t fret! It is nothing so very dreadful to have to wait. I’m young enough, and it’s pleasanter, perhaps, being engaged than married. But, all the same, it is a bore.”

Mrs. Field kept in her sigh till she had closed the door. Whatever happened Viola must not be troubled. That was the first article of her faith.

“Well?” her husband growled in his grumpiest tone, as she returned. “Now you’ve succeeded in making breakfast thoroughly uncomfortable, as you’re so fond of doing, messing after Vi, perhaps you’ll condescend to give me another cup of coffee.”

Mrs. Field hastened to do so, to attend to her husband’s and her own wants. She was a good-tempered woman, and wisely refrained from irritating her husband when he was cross. He went on presently, as soon as he had helped himself to a fish cutlet—

“Has Vi heard this precious piece of news?”

“Yes, poor dear.”

“And what does she say to it?”

“Oh, nothing particular. She’s not one to trouble herself about money affairs, you know; only that they must wait.”

“Wait!” Mr. Field gave a short contemptuous laugh. “I should rather think so. No, Vi’s not the girl to bother her head about money; she’s had a father to do that for her. But neither is she the one to marry into poverty. No one less so.”

“I know that. Viola is much too delicate to stand the least bit of roughing. But, listen here, James. She’s not able to bear being troubled or thwarted; she looks quite ill, poor dear, and I’m going to get Dr. Maynard to see her. The least thing upsets her—I won’t have you talking to her about breaking this off.”

“A pretty way to talk to a father! You

won't have me say my mind to my own daughter."

"No, I won't. Viola's all we've got. She's one that a breath might blow away, and she shan't be troubled or grieved if I'm alive to help it. She's got to be managed. It isn't as if she didn't care for Geoff, she's downright in love with him—it's no mere fancy. Viola's had her passing flirtations and little affairs, like other girls, and they did no harm ; but this is different. When Geoff comes, there's a look in her eyes, a sound in her voice different from what there ever was. If this engagement were broken off suddenly, if it *could* be, delicate as she is, I believe it would kill her."

"Well, bless my soul, Liddy, are you going to give your consent to her marrying into sheer want ?"

"No, I'm not saying that. I only say, wait and see. Manage her. Don't talk and make a row and fuss about her not

having him. There's no hurry—the thing may end of itself. I tell you what I think would be best, James——”

“Well, tell away”—as she paused—
“you're always as obstinate as a mule where Vi's concerned.”

“You know Dr. Maynard has talked more than once of Viola's wintering at the Riviera?”

“Ay, a jolly nice expense!”

“Well, my dear, you can afford it, if you choose. I suppose you'd rather afford it than lose her?”

“Bosh about losing! You fuss so confoundedly over the child's health, and Maynard backs you up for his own sake. It's only a delicate look Vi has; she must have a strong constitution to have lived through such a lot of illnesses.”

“Well, I know that. You don't suppose *I* could bear to think differently? But still she needs care—any one can see that—and since it would be good for her to winter

abroad, and you can afford it—oh, don't begin to growl, I *know* you can if you choose—it'll be far the best for you and me to take her to Cannes. You can spend Christmas there with us and then come home and leave us. Then, if there is really no chance of her marrying Geoffrey, the absence and change will be just the best thing in the world for her."

Mrs. Field was surprised to find that her husband did not begin to protest and oppose as he usually did, even when he yielded in the end. He looked almost compliant as he thoughtfully ate his breakfast. At last he spoke.

"Well, it may be the best. And I shouldn't object to running over to Monte Carlo. I believe Lees is there."

"That would be nice for you," his wife said diplomatically, and said no more. She had not lived twenty-five years with James Field without knowing how to manage him. Yet on some points, when

he turned obstinate, her more easy, lighter nature had to give way. There were times when it was like beating against a rock to oppose him ; it only bruised her, and made no impression on him. She was thankful now to have reached a place for delay and compromise. Dr. Maynard must be persuaded into declaring the Riviera imperative. The rest might wait.

Mrs. Field was a woman not given to looking ahead. The day, with its small affairs, its little bustle of pleasure, its comfort and luxury, was enough for her. It had been a very agreeable world to her, on the whole, and she did not see why people need grumble as they did. It was generally their own fault, she considered, if things went wrong. Oh yes, there was, she supposed, plenty of poverty and crime in London. Good people and clergymen talked about it, and one did see horrid-looking creatures in the street

sometimes. Really at night it was "hardly nice" to drive through them ! But everybody was always giving money. She never refused herself to subscribe to anything. There were plenty of churches and parsons. No one need be neglected nowadays, and it was no good making one's self miserable about what wasn't one's business. The world, as she saw it, was chiefly made for her and Viola. This one girl was to have not so much as a crumpled rose-leaf on her bed of down. Surrounded from babyhood with soft luxuriance, sheltered, cherished, adored, it was really a wonder that Viola was not a spoilt, affected piece of selfishness. Her nature must have been a sweet one originally, for even her selfishness was not objectionable, and her charm was not in self-consciousness. That half-pathetic grace of hers gave a wistfulness to her pretty looks and ways, and made her just a little different from the rest of

the "golden lasses" who were in her world. The fascination that was hers was a subtle, intangible thing that no one could define, yet it was real. It was not only her mother and her lover who found it the sweetest thing in the world to earn her soft, delicious half-smile of thanks. When she said anything caressing—she was not demonstrative or lavish with caresses—when she left her soft small hands in any grasp a moment longer than usual, the result was a gratitude quite disproportionate, an absurd exultation and thrill. The fairies had endowed her richly in her cradle with those gifts that no one can buy, foremost of all the gift of people's hearts. It had been "roses, roses all the way" so far with Viola. In a hothouse atmosphere it is possible to gather roses all the year round. The time of chills and frosts had never come yet for her.

Geoffrey had half expected a "jolly

row" when Mr. Field became aware of the disastrous change in his prospects. He was surprised to find that not much was said about it. In truth, he had dreaded in his heart to hear that his engagement was now considered an impossible affair. It had never, he knew, been acceptable to Viola's father. But no one actually said so. Viola talked as if this come-down in their hopes was, after all, but a trifle. Oh, they would have to wait; that did not matter. Waiting was evidently no disaster to her, and he had to acquiesce, for of course it was out of all reason to expect that Mr. Field's only daughter should marry a man whose income, in the eyes of the habitually rich, seemed simply ridiculous in its inadequacy.

"You'll have to show me you can keep a wife as I think my daughter ought to be kept; then we'll talk about your marrying," was all that Mr. Field said on the

subject ; but he did not demand any immediate rupture. They were full of preparations for their journey.

It was a blow to Geoffrey to find that he was almost directly to have to part with his darling, and to spend Christmas without her ; but there were a few delicious days first, and Viola was especially delicious. She had never shown him so much fondness, forgetting to be coy, wayward, coquettishly distant, as she often chose to be. He left ways and means out of the question for the moment ; to work, to do anything but make love, was not worth while just then. There was no hurry for these tiresome thoughts. After she was gone he would set to and begin to try the unaccustomed game of money-making. The work-a-day world waited grimly for him when she should be gone with the sunshine into the sunshine. It is not a pleasant world, and Geoffrey was not a very happy man when he settled

down into his solitary chambers with the unpleasant fact staring him in the face that he had before him six months or so in which there was to be not one glimpse of Viola's sweet eyes to cheer the sombre days. He had been too much of a butterfly, and felt the outlook to be wintry and forlorn.





CHAPTER V.

BY the simple process of shifting all work and responsibility from her own shoulders to those of others, Mrs. Trevenna had managed to attain what she chiefly desired for the ordering of her life in her new home, that is to say, almost entire irresponsibility.

“Is there anything now I can do for you?” Mr. Hamley concluded a long and lucid statement of her affairs with. It was partly a polite *façon de parler*, and he hardly expected her to avail herself of it, as she did at once.

“Oh yes, please—a great many things,” she answered, with unusual promptitude.

"First of all, I wish you would be kind enough to tell Mrs. Smithson that I have a—a housekeeper coming, so I shan't want her. If it can be managed, I should like her to go quite soon."

"Oh, it can be managed, no doubt!" Mr. Hamley announced, raising his eyebrows; "only she is a valuable servant, and may feel hurt by so summary a dismissal."

"I don't want to hurt her at all," Mrs. Trevenna said rather piteously. "I would be glad to give her any money, and of course she will get a good place; but I am afraid of telling her myself, and, if she is angry, I should like her to go soon."

Mr. Hamley could not repress a smile. "Well, Mrs. Trevenna, I will try and do what I can for you there. And the other servants?"

"I should be glad to have *all* new ones, please," she said timidly. "I—I think it

would be better. People who haven't heard anything about us. Jane knows two who would come, I think."

"Ah, Jane is your housekeeper? Well, if one goes, perhaps all had better. Very well. Anything else, is there?"

"Yes, please. I want you to be so good as to manage *all* my money for me, Mr. Hamley, always."

"My dear Mrs. Trevenna! That is a large order."

"But, indeed, I cannot understand anything about shares and stocks and things. What I like is to have enough money in the bank to pay every month, and not have to consider anything else. My head is very confused and stupid. I never was clever, and I get worse and worse. I have never been obliged to manage money at all, and, if I do but think of shares and per cents., it makes my brain whirl and buzz dreadfully. If you will just manage for me, and only let me have what I

want to spend, it will be very kind of you."

"If I were a dishonest man," thought Mr. Hamley, "what a chance I should have!"

He was a *very* honest man, but it was not in lawyer nature not to enjoy the absolute *carte blanche* thus given him. Mrs. Trevenna of Redwood certainly promised to be a desirable client. She flung her affairs and herself unreservedly upon him, with no more suspicion, no more hesitation, than a child. It was fortunate for her that he was thoroughly to be trusted. In the same way she left the management of the house to Jane, who was now to be dignified with the title of Mrs. Chegwidden, to have no occasion any more for actual manual labour, and the liberty of complete uncontrol. Jane accepted her new office with the stoical reserve and strength which was her character. She kept up an attitude of

dignified respect before strangers with her sister and niece, though it vexed Penrose that she should do so, as all deception galled and vexed her; but when they were alone she spent her time with "Mary," whom she treated in private just as she had always done, with a mixture of petting and authority, half contempt and half affection, which suited the younger sister better than any new kind of treatment would have done.

"She is not—not at all a clever woman, eh?" Mr. Grey remarked of Mrs. Trevenna, in his kindly hesitating way to Mr. Hamley, after one of their business talks as executors of the will.

"Clever! My dear Grey, the stupidest woman I've come across for a long while. No wonder poor Trevenna tired of her, unless she were very different when she was young. I suppose she *was* pretty"—dubiously, for Mrs. Trevenna certainly kept small remains of beauty.

“So we must suppose,” Mr. Grey said innocently, “or it is difficult to see what attracted. But she has rather a dazed, bewildered air; it is possible she is not what she was. Her daughter does not resemble her in any particular, does she?”

“Not in the least, that I can see. Nor is she like her father, though there *is* a Trevenna look.”

“There is; but the likeness is more to Richard’s sister who died young—at seventeen. Poor Katherine!” And Mr. Grey sighed. In his early youth he had had a slight *tendresse* for that slim, dark-eyed Katherine. “Yes, she has a look of the Trevennas.”

“But more still to her aunt. You know that Jane Chegwidden is her aunt?”

“Yes, I know it. Ay, there is a certain resemblance. It is a curious household for old Redwood! I wonder how the neighbours will take them up.”

"The vicar and Mrs. Underwood will call, and Mrs. Brett. I fancy the county people will hold aloof, at any rate, for a while. Of course there's a vast amount of gossip afoot."

"Of course. But if they get to know her, people cannot think ill of Penrose."

"You have taken to her, haven't you, very much?"

"Yes. She is a girl of a fine character, true, loyal, and generous. Besides, Hamley, I feel as if I must care for some one at Redwood. There is such a great gap to fill in my life."

"Yes, yes, I am sure of it. I believe she is a good girl, and clever in a way; there is nothing in the least inferior about *her*, at any rate."

"Inferior! No indeed. Poor Trevenna would have been proud of such a child had all been right. She is not like other girls; she seems to come from other times, from a more chivalrous, a less artificial

age. I know little of modern young ladies ; but it seems to me that want of art—want of self-consciousness, at any rate—is not their leading characteristic. A little of the modesty and restraint of the past seems lacking. Penrose has not been in that world of society at all ; Nature has had the moulding of her.”

“‘And made a lady of her own,’ eh ? Yes. I think Miss Penrose is a lady. It is a good thing you can like her.”

In fact, Mr. Grey and Penrose had struck up a quiet but sincere friendship. The kind, gentle, thoughtful old bachelor, with his little surface awkwardnesses and deep inward refinement, was attractive to the girl, who was apt to disregard the outside of things, and had her own unconventional ways of judging.

She could be herself with him, for there was no deception to keep up ; he knew all that story, which for the sake of others she was obliged to hide from outsiders.

Of course there was plenty of gossip floating about. The sudden appearance on the scene of an unknown wife and grown-up daughter was startling, and left room for the widest conjecture. Who, and what, had this Mrs. Trevenna been? What made the master of Redwood keep her existence dark, and then disinherit his supposed heir in favour of these interlopers? *When* had he been married? that was the question one matron asked another. And shall we take any notice of them after the proper period for—supposititious—mourning? There was nothing positively *objectionable* about the appearance of the widow. In orthodox and handsome black, she looked a quiet sort of person, not a lady probably. As for the daughter, her plain black serge and felt hat were hardly “proper mourning for a father,” and she had “no style;” but she was not offensive in any way. Dr. Brett and the vicar, indeed, declared

her handsome, and Mr. Grey seemed infatuated about her. Poor Mr. Grey! It was easy enough to take *him* in. Well, a call could do no harm. Mrs. Underwood, the vicar's wife, decided to call, and Dr. Brett had taken his lively, bustling little wife in to make acquaintance before any one else. Gingerly and slowly the neighbourhood put out delicate feelers of politeness, but no approach to intimacy seemed likely to follow. Of course all festivities were out of the question—fortunately, when people were not sure what to do.

Next summer perhaps Miss Trevenna might like to be asked to tennis-parties. All the sympathy was for Geoffrey, who, everybody agreed, had been *abominably* treated! Such a nice, handsome, pleasant fellow, it was really a shame to oust him! And he was quite *poor* now. It was to be hoped Miss Field would stick to him, for there was lots of money there. It was really a thousand pities he should not be

able to marry and settle at Redwood. A nice, lively, fashionable young couple there, who would entertain, and have the gloomy old house full, would have made all the difference to the neighbourhood. Whatever these people might be, *they* would be no social acquisition.

A quiet, mumpy sort of widow, who seemed dull and uninteresting to a degree, and a girl without any style or knowledge of the world! It was a thousand pities altogether.

The gossip of the circle received a pleasing impetus before the end of the winter, when Miss Celia Folliott from Copsley happened to come to Eckerton Vicarage, in which parish Redwood was situated, to stay with her mother's old friend, Mrs. Underwood. When the name of *Trevenna* was carelessly mentioned, she began to wonder where she had heard it, and, after a time, remembered some talk of her mother's in which it

occurred. But the connection was not established till the second Sunday she was there, when Penrose happened to go to church.

It was, as in Copsley, one of the things quoted against Mrs. Trevenna that she did not go to church. To be sure she might be too much of an invalid—illness is very apt to take a peculiar form on Sundays; but that did not excuse the fact that her housekeeper and *all* the servants were Dissenters, and that she had not wished to engage a very desirable “G.F.S. girl” as under housemaid, preferring the daughter of a Radical Baptist shoemaker. Penrose, too, was not regular in her attendance at church, and though she seemed to go about the village a great deal, and get to know the people in her own way, she did not start with the proper, established system of parish work, and she declined teaching in the Sunday school, which was a sad sign of deficient

zeal in Mrs. Underwood's eyes. She had mentally offended the vicar's wife also, by going to church in preference when the *curate* preached, and had even been brusque enough to tell Florence Underwood that she admired his sermons. Mr. Bracy *was* clever, and in her secret heart the vicar's wife knew her husband to be prosy; but people do not, as a rule, praise the curate to the vicar's family. This Sunday Penrose came in rather late, after all the people had stood up, and passed quickly to the Redwood seat, with a beautiful colour in her face from quick walking. She was as simply dressed as usual, in very week-day garments; but she looked her best, with that fine flush of health and hurry on her usually rather pale face, a flush which lighted up her large eyes and made them brilliant. She held her head up, as was her custom, in that dauntless fashion which had reminded Geoffrey of the warrior maid Britomart.

A coil of her thick brown hair had slipped from its fastening, and, though untidy, looked rather picturesque. The ladies in church did not admire her, however—she looked too unconventional, too careless of what other people thought ; but it occurred forcibly to the masculine mind that Miss Trevenna was fine-looking. As she passed, Celia Folliott glanced at her, and the one glance gave her such a surprise, that she did not let her eyes return as swiftly to her Prayer-book as a clergyman's daughter should, though her lips mechanically formed the response.

“Why, good gracious,” she thought, with a mental start, “it is really Penrose Hall! Then there *must* be something in old Miss Babb's surmises.”

Mrs. Folliott had fondly supposed her girls had known nothing of all those tales about Mrs. Hall, which Miss Babb had industriously propagated ; but Celia and Gracie Folliott were perfectly modern,

wide-awake young persons, and had drawn the old lady out on the subject, knowing all that was known and all that was conjectured about Mrs. Hall's disappearance from the scene and the connection with the name of Trevenna. Celia was, of course, in a fever to hear all that Flo Underwood had to say on the subject; it was a pity they were in church, and she had to wait to find out what it was. Meanwhile she watched Penrose, who had never looked her way, and so was ignorant of the presence of the girl who belonged to her past. She put up her hand as her hair caught in something, to find that it was loose on her neck, and tucked it in as calmly as if no one had been present; to do this she pulled off her gloves and showed her strong, well-formed, but rather brown, ringless hands. She had not an ornament on but one plain silver brooch. A ladies'-maid out for Sunday would have disdained every article of dress she

wore, every milliner and shop-girl present was much smarter, yet she had an air of distinction in those eyes which knew how to understand it ; nobody would have dared to call her common, no, not the vulgarest mind there. She listened evidently with real interest to the sermon, which was worth listening to, but rather above most people's heads. Mr. Bracy was a scholar and an original-minded man, not in the least a popular, ladies' curate, preferring cricket with the yokels, to lawn-tennis and tea on polite lawns. He had found out that Miss Trevenna really *listened* to him and had got in the habit of knowing when she was in church. They had a brief matter-of-fact word or two together when they met by chance in the village, but no one had yet thought of accusing them of a flirtation ; neither of them was the sort to flirt, and not even the densest could fail to see this. In the porch, Celia managed adroitly to knock against Penrose, who

turned and recognized her at the moment. They looked at each other full. Celia smiled a rather artificial little smile, and Penrose—yes, everybody noticed that Penrose coloured deeply.

“It *is* Penrose Hall, I declare!” Celia cried, quite loud enough for any one to hear. “How do you come to be here, and how are you, Penrose?”

“My name is Trevenna—now,” the other answered, in a low and hurried voice. She was ashamed, and yet she knew she deserved no shame. “I am living with my mother near here. How do you do, Miss Folliott? How are they all at Copsley Vicarage?”

“My dear Celia, how odd! You know Miss Trevenna?” cried Mrs. Underwood, scenting a mystery and keen on it at once. “But I thought you called her some other name?”

“Yes,” Celia answered, in her clear voice, speaking with elaborate non-

chalance, "I knew her at Copsley as Miss Hall."

Then, pitying the other with a half-contemptuous good nature, she went on, "I'm staying with Mrs. Underwood at Eckerton. I dare say I shall see something of you." And, shaking hands, they separated.





CHAPTER VI.

“**W**HY, my dear Celia, how extraordinary ! What do you know of Miss Trevenna ? ”

These words were eagerly poured out directly the groups had separated at the church gates. Gossip after church has a peculiarly piquant flavour. Celia Folliott was by no means loth to impart all she knew ; the mystery of the Halls and their sudden departure from Copsley did not lose in the telling.

“ Dear, dear, then I’m afraid those insinuations about Mrs. Trevenna’s past, that some people have thrown out, must have some foundation ! Why should she

pass as a Mrs. Hall, if she were married to Mr. Trevenna? They might have quarrelled and separated, but she would not be ashamed of a name she had a right to bear. And certainly she has not seemed to want to know people since she has been here. I did not like to think anything uncharitable, but it always did strike me as odd. There is something strange about them all. I really don't think people whose past will not bear the looking into ought to expect to get into good society"—this in a virtuous tone.

"But *did* she expect, mother?" Florence Underwood asked drily. She was a girl apt to be rather sarcastic with her mother, and was reported to be "not good-tempered," but there were points about her superior to the rest of the family. She had a certain sense of duty, and some secret aspirations after something better than the petty life she had to live. She and the clever curate were good friends,

and Florence had some inward hopes regarding him, unshared even with her sister. "You always complained of Mrs. and Miss Trevenna for being so unsociable and not wanting to be friendly."

"I dare say, now, they had reasons," Mrs. Underwood calmly rejoined. She was a woman a little soured by a good many untoward events in her life, and disappointment both in her sons, who had turned out wild, and her daughters, who were no longer in their first youth, and neither married nor likely to be.

Celia found it quite exciting to light on such an incident in the course of a quiet visit. She wrote an account of her meeting with Penrose at once to her mother.

"Penrose will not be over-anxious to call while I am here, I suspect," she remarked ; but she was wrong.

The next morning, at an unorthodox time to call, Penrose came, and asked to see Mrs. Underwood. She was a little

pale when that lady came in rather doubtfully, and greeted her with some coldness ; but there was no shame or confusion in her valiant glance.

“Mrs. Underwood,” she said, going straight to the point, as was her wont, without hesitation or preamble, “after what Miss Folliott must have told you yesterday, I am sure you are thinking that we have deceived you all. It has been on my mind many a time that you and the other people who have called on us at Redwood must have thought what was not the fact about us, for there is nothing I hate as I do falsehood or deception. If it had been *my* secret I would have told you at once ; but it is not. I felt bound to keep my mother’s. I will stand by her and with her whatever happens. She is first to me in all the world.”

Mrs. Underwood could hardly help feeling with a sort of pang that her own

well-brought-up, indulged daughters would not, could not say the same of her. The stern lines of her worn face relaxed a little.

Penrose went on. "Will you please tell me what Miss Folliott has said?"

Mrs. Underwood cleared her throat; it was a little difficult to speak to this daughter of what stories were afloat about her mother.

"Hem! She—she only mentioned the fact you did not dispute, Miss Trevenna, that you were known at Copsley by the name of Hall, and that you left the place rather suddenly early last spring."

"Yes, we were known as Hall. We had no right to the name of Trevenna till afterwards. I have legally taken the name, or I should say I have no right to it now."

"Oh, your mother was a widow when she married Mr. Trevenna? You are not his daughter?"

Penrose paused a moment. Her paleness increased, and there was a look of deep pain in her eyes. If she had been of the stuff to deceive she might have saved her mother's name by a well-concocted story. But not even for that could she force her lips into a lie.

"Yes," she said, in a low voice, "I am his daughter. If Miss Folliott had not told you what she has, I need not have said anything; but it is the truth."

Mrs. Underwood's mind was confused with different sensations. She was conscious of a reluctant respect and pity for the girl, whose words seemed wrung out of her by a force she could not resist; but she was also gratified by knowing the truth of the matter, and angry with having been deceived in any way about "this Mrs. Trevenna." She searched for some appropriate words, but they were difficult to find.

"Of course I can understand," she

began rather haltingly. "It is quite natural for you to take your mother's side, but it was hardly right to lead us all to suppose that—that—that there was nothing unusual about Mrs. Trevenna's position or—or antecedents!"

"I hated it," Penrose said, in a low voice, deep and sad with suppressed feeling; "but I do not think, for her sake, I could have done differently."

"Do you wish to see Miss Folliott?" Mrs. Underwood said after an awkward little pause, which she tried to fill by a cough. "Perhaps it would be unpleasant for you."

"I don't think I wish to see her, thank you," Penrose answered abruptly. "We were not friends."

"It was good of you—and, I fear, painful—to come to explain. Of course it is an unhappy state of things, but *you* are not to blame, Miss Trevenna."

For the first time Penrose flushed. It

was with anger. She spoke haughtily in reply to the well-meant soothing, which only hurt her.

“I had rather be blamed myself, Mrs. Underwood, than hear a word against my mother. I accept her position in everything. If the people here do not wish to know her, I am quite content that they and I shall be strangers. I don't separate myself from my mother in any single way.”

“My dear Miss Trevenna, you really need not speak to me in such a tone!”

Penrose did not apologize. “I cannot help it,” she said, in the same voice, without softening it. “We do not want any one to know us—we have done without friends always—we can do without them. No one need think that we want to be tolerated in any society!”

“It is not easy to do without friends.”

“No, it is not easy ; at least, it is not pleasant. We have never found life

exactly pleasant or easy, but it is endurable. There are people who can be friends, real friends, and yet who know all there is to know."

"I am sure," Mrs. Underwood began, hesitating between a sense of the proprieties and some kinder impulse, "I wish to be your friend, Miss Trevenna—you must see the awkwardness of my position."

"I shall not refuse kindness for *my mother*," Penrose said proudly. It was difficult to attempt any condescension to so independent and brusque a young woman.

"I will do what I can," Mrs. Underwood said vaguely. "I am a clergyman's wife. I hope I am not uncharitable; but I have daughters to consider."

"I wish no one need have been deceived about us," Penrose said sadly, as she rose to leave; "but I hope you understand that we ask for *nothing* from our neighbours. I should be sorry to do any

one any harm." There was some sarcasm in her voice. She bowed without taking her hand from her muff to meet Mrs. Underwood's, and left the room before that lady had decided what she meant to say.

Of course there was plenty of comment afterwards. Mrs. Underwood "felt it her duty" to impart in confidence to intimate friends that there *was* something in those tales about Mrs. Trevenna. Celia was not silent, nor were the Underwood girls, though Florence took a different line from the rest. She was always the one to choose the emancipated view of things. For her part, she said, she did not see that it mattered a pin when that poor, stupid, dowdy Mrs. Trevenna was married. She was correct and quiet enough now, in all conscience; she dared say it was all the man's fault, it always was. Men were a detestable race, and she had heard her father say Mr. Trevenna had been wild,

and held all sorts of dangerous opinions. As for Miss Trevenna, there was no blame to be given to her ; she was not a society girl evidently, and was not easy to get on with, very *farouche* and all that, but no one could say she was the sort to connect with anything bad. She herself should try and make up to her after this, if she could.

But the discreet and worldly wise matrons held aloof and shook their heads. Mrs. Trevenna was a person whose past would not bear inquiring into, quite low born probably ; she ought not to be in the position of the mistress of Redwood. Mrs. Smithson, who lived so long there as housekeeper, and was such a nice respectable woman, had told odd tales about her to her new mistress, old Lady Mackenzie of the Lodge, who loved to gossip with her servants. It was better just to be on civil terms, but not to let things go any further. In short, Mrs.

Trevenna was to be courteously boycotted, and since Miss Trevenna chose to take the line she had done, she must be in the same position. This was the decree of the neighbourhood, and social laws are like those of the Medes, they alter not.

So the mother and daughter were as much alone as they had been at Copsley, and except for the change from a cottage to a large house, from a small though sufficient income to what seemed to their unsophisticated minds great riches, they had gained little by the change of fortune.

Mrs. Trevenna indeed seemed to have lost by it. She had never really recovered the shock of that letter which began it all ; the changes and the terrors she had endured since had told upon her. She was feeble, lymphatic, nervous, irritable, given to fits of meaningless weeping. Nothing seemed to rouse or interest her. Her favourite knitting did not progress ; if

Penrose read or talked to her, she listened for a while, and then seemed to wander into a sort of misty maze of ideas. She got up late, sat by the fire, a mass of shawls and cushions, unless Penrose almost forced her to take a dragging, listless walk when the sun shone under the long south wall of the garden, ate and enjoyed her meals, drank a great deal of tea, and seemed to like Jane to sit with her in the afternoons, while Penrose took those long solitary walks with her new collie, which seemed to keep her mind and body in health. When she was alone with her sister, Mrs. Trevenna seemed to revive; she liked to hear the little affairs of the household, particulars about the servants, whom Jane ruled with an iron hand, the awful waste they were accustomed to in the kitchen, the small-talk of the neighbourhood, the little reminiscences of Copsley and the cottage.

Jane was anxious about her sister, who

was, after all, her first care and object in life, and being absorbed in her, she did not notice Penrose as much as usual. She did not see that the girl was altering, that her smile had grown sadly rare, and that an expression of brooding, solitary care had come upon her face. Jane was not young, she had never had a bright life, and had learnt to think little or nothing about her own desires and losses, and it did not occur to her that Penrose was not twenty-three, and that this was a dreary and lonely existence for her—without friendship or sympathy from her kind, without any sunshine at all ; that the girl in her first womanhood had never tasted a single girlish joy. And brave, independent, spirited as she was, Penrose felt the tacit avoidance with which she was treated. People were civil enough when she met them ; but she stood outside, and they meant her to be outside, of all the cosy circles of intimates. The only people in

the place who ever tried to be friendly were Florence Underwood and Mr. Bracy, the curate. She did not care much for Florence, but liked Mr. Bracy, and met his rather blunt advances in her straightforward way. Now and then she walked with him when their roads lay together, and enjoyed a little chat, which all the world might have heard, about the village folk, about dogs in general, and her Robin in particular, about books, or his travels, for he had been in Australia and New Zealand. Neither of them had the remotest idea of anything of a flirtation. George Bracy was as incapable of it as Penrose, which is saying a great deal; he liked her and was sorry for her, and she liked him, that was all. But the country gossips could not believe in such an all when the man is still young and unattached and the girl good-looking. "There must be something in it," so the wise-heads agreed; and Florence

Underwood heard it said all round her till she began to believe it, and, discouraged by Penrose's rather cold manner, left off trying to be agreeable, and if she did not join the chorus of dispraise, no longer defended her.

This was the state of things at Redwood in the early spring, when Geoffrey, who had seen nothing of his new relations all the winter, having occasion to visit Oxford and stay at Mr. Grey's, went over to see them.

Mr. Grey lived in a world of his own. He had not been able lately to go much to Redwood, since he had been kept indoors by a bad cold, and nobody ever brought any gossip to him. So all he could tell Geoffrey was that Mrs. Trevenna seemed a good deal of an invalid, and went out very little, and that they led a very quiet life.

"Does any one ask Penrose out, do you know?"

“I don't know, indeed. I fancy not; I imagine she is not a girl to care much about visiting.”

“Does she ever come into Oxford?”

“She called on me about a week ago, and brought me some flowers from the greenhouse, hearing I was not well, and she stopped to have tea. She is a very kind, feeling sort of girl. I like her much.”

“Did she look well, and bright? It must be a dull life.”

“Well? Yes, I think so; perhaps not particularly bright. Now you mention it, I did think she had rather too grave and careworn a face for a girl to wear.”

“Enough to make her, if she is shut up in that old house, with a dull, heavy woman like that mother of hers!”

“Well, yes, to be sure; it cannot be gay.”

“Gay! Rather like the vault of the Capulets, I should think. I must go over

to Redwood this evening. What time do they dine?"

"Early, I fancy. They seem to have very simple habits. Yes, it would be kind to look them up, Geoff."

Geoffrey felt himself kind and rather magnanimous too, when he walked out from Oxford in the raw afternoon, between the lights, to pay his respects to the people who had turned him out of his expected inheritance. He was not in first-rate spirits himself; it was a new experience to him to have to think about money, to plan and work to increase an income which, before, he had looked upon as only temporary, to be endured till he came into a better one. His habits were extravagant. It had never occurred to him to think twice about giving half a crown for a flower, five shillings for magazines to read on a journey; not to travel in a first-class smoking, to buy any but the most expensive cigars, to abstain from

champagne with his dinner at the club, if he felt inclined for it. All this was galling, but he had less prosaic causes for depression. He wanted to see Viola again, and to be quite sure that change of circumstances meant no other change. He had hoped to be able to look forward to a period close at hand when they should meet. She had always written that they should be home the middle of May. Unfortunately, she had been ill in March, and now the return was indefinitely postponed. Mr. Lees' married sister, a rich widow, Mrs. Williams, who had been at Cannes with them, and had been exceedingly kind, Viola said, had invited her mother and her to accompany her in the early summer to the Italian lakes. Mr. Field, against whom Geoffrey had run in Fleet Street, had informed him, with great glee, of this, and Geoffrey thought he detected a malicious emphasis on the fact that this was "Tom Lees' sister."

He had dilated on Viola's pleasure in the idea. Geoffrey had felt vaguely disgusted, angry, discontented with everything. He had always disliked Viola's father ; he felt as if he detested him with all his soul, while he bragged on about Mrs. Williams' riches, generosity, and devotion to Vi.

Viola's letters had never been satisfactory. Her bald, inartistic descriptions needed the pretty, plaintive voice to tell them ; her style was crude, school-girlish, and illiterate ; her writing and spelling both left much to be desired. She was not so lavish of caressing epithets as writers of love-letters are wont to be. Of course, during her illness, he had none, only a line or two from Mrs. Field to tell him how Viola was. She felt dreadfully out of his reach. If it had not been for that cursed want of money, he would have gone to visit her for Easter, as she suggested ; but he could not manage it,

for, besides the expense, he had a case on in London which, since cases were few and far between, he could not throw up. He felt decidedly at odds with Fortune. It spoke well for him that he was not too selfish to care a little about Penrose, when he heard an account of her from Mr. Grey that sounded decidedly dismal. He had almost forgotten her in the stress of other interests ; but, now that something recalled her again, he remembered the liking he had taken to her kind, clear, honest eyes, and frank simplicity of speech.





CHAPTER VII.

GEOFFREY walked out of Oxford in the direction of Redwood, treading the road familiar to him from childhood. He knew every stone of it—the suburban road first, with villas, gardens, and perambulating nursemaids ; then the country, little-frequented thoroughfare, with the elm-trees on each side, and the peeps of sodden-looking fields, farm-houses, and here and there a gentleman's house and grounds. The trees were shivering into their first thin garment of yellowish-brown, the blackthorn was in bud ; there was a raw feeling of half-reluctant promise in the air. It seemed

to him that the thrush singing there amongst the half-clothed boughs was the very same bird that he had known twenty springs ago. As he got to the turn that brought the stumpy tower of Eckerton Church into view, he saw a girl ahead of him—a tall and upright figure, plainly clad, with skirts well out of the mud, and a bough or two of palm, with its fluffy, yellow-white tufts, hanging from one hand. A discursive collie dog, much interested in his own proceedings, but still with a remembrance of being on duty, rambled about her. As she turned to look for him, Geoffrey and Penrose recognized each other at the same moment. He saw a light and colour of pleasure flash across the open face, which had been rather melancholy before, and a smile came into his eyes and under his moustache in answer. He felt quite glad to see her, and to see that she was glad too.

“Well met, Cousin Penrose!” he cried, overtaking her and grasping her outstretched hand. “I was coming to pay my respects to you.”

“Were you? That was good of you! I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Trevenna.”

“Are you? Then please drop that formal title, and manage to call me by a cousinly name. I ought not to have waited so long in coming, but I hope you will forgive me.”

She looked surprised. “Forgive you! Why, we did not expect you to come.”

“Didn’t you? And pray why not? Oxford is not so far from London.”

“Why, I—I knew it could not be very pleasant for you to visit Redwood now, and it is a very dull, quiet household we have, with nothing to make you want to come.”

“Nonsense. There is quite enough.

But why should it be such a dull, quiet household ? ”

“ There is only mother and me—and my mother’s sister. People do not know she is that, but I do not want you not to understand things. It is no wish of mine that she passes as mother’s housekeeper.”

“ And don’t you have people to see you ? ”

Penrose shook her head. She tried to smile, but it was with a visible effort.

“ No, hardly ever. Now and then Mr. Grey comes, or Dr. Brett ; the curate, Mr. Bracy, pretty often.”

“ And no one else ? Have you no women friends ? ”

“ No. People called or left cards at first, but it ended there.”

“ Why ? What is the reason ? Tell me, if you don’t mind, Penrose.”

“ No,” she answered, though she coloured and avoided his keen dark eyes, “ I don’t mind telling you. It is a relief to

talk to somebody. I suppose, anyhow, there is not much reason why people should have taken us up. My mother is very shy, very distant, not at all used to society; and I am not agreeable or lively—not like those girls I see about who know what to do and say, and how to make themselves popular. I do not think we should anyhow have been *popular*. I can quite understand how stupid we must seem. But, besides that, there is a reason why people should avoid—well, perhaps, not exactly avoid—but not be inclined at all to be friendly. It is a reason, as society goes. I always felt uncomfortable at coming here under false pretences, as it were, just as if we were quite like other people; but it could not be helped. I had to be silent, not for my own sake. However, it happened that things came out. There was a young lady staying at the vicarage here who was the daughter of the clergyman at Copsley, where we

lived—where my mother was known as Mrs. Hall. She and I met, and after that—after that, you know, I had to tell Mrs. Underwood the truth. It made a difference in the way people looked at us. I suppose that could not be helped.”

She spoke slowly, with little breaks, still with her usual unflinching directness. Her voice was sad, with the weariness in it which is unnatural in a girl. A want of hope and energy in her whole manner struck him as a change. Before, though she had not been in a happy mood, he had noticed the vitality, the elasticity of hopeful courage about her. He felt sorry and angry at the same moment—sorry for her, angry with the narrow conventionalities of the world in which he had always lived. It was a shame to treat this innocent, pure, upright girl as if she had done something to disgrace herself. Well for those who despised her had they so white a record!

"Was it really necessary for you to have told Mrs. Underwood what you did?" he asked tentatively, partly prepared for the answer flashed back from her half-angry eyes.

"Of course it was, as if one could go on in a lie!"

"My dear cousin, most people find it quite possible and comfortable. I am afraid you are fond of fighting, and make barriers round you for the pleasure of knocking them over. I'm sorry it has happened. I'm afraid you are not happy in your new home. You don't look quite as if you were; but you deserve to be. I wish you were."

"No," she answered briefly, "I'm not very happy. I dare say it is paltry of me to mind these things. I should be able to make my own life, and be independent of what people think or do."

"I think you are quite independent enough," he returned, smiling. "You talk

as if you were a middle-aged philosopher. You are only a young girl, after all. Girls generally consider they have a divine right to be happy, and that it doesn't fulfil the laws of nature when they are not."

She glanced at him with a vivid gratitude glowing in her face—not in the least as a maiden conscious of her sex and youth is wont to look a handsome man in the eyes, but as a warm-hearted boy might do to one who has proved his friend. Geoffrey's cordial manner, which had always a sort of grace about it, his ready sympathy, these thrilled her starved heart, which was meant to be warm and full, but had so little to satisfy it.

"It is very, very kind of you to care whether I am happy or not!" she said fervently.

He felt half ashamed of the gratitude, so disproportioned to the cause.

"Kind! I have done nothing at all kind yet. You must give me the chance.

I hate to think of your being lonely and sad. It isn't fair, it is cruel."

"Oh, you must not trouble about me, Geoffrey. I am not really sad. It is foolish to make anything of such trifles. And as for its being unfair or cruel, it is not so either. I can imagine that the people here think we deceived them. I had rather they knew the truth and left us alone, than have any friends under false pretences."

"You are too magnanimous, Penrose. If you indulged in a hearty dislike it would relieve you. Even foolish people have the power of hurting one if one is sensitive, and I think, in spite of all your courage, you are that."

"I don't know. Yes, they *did* hurt me, a little. I confess it is rather hard sometimes to be without friends."

"Come now, you are not *that*. That would be too unjust."

"No, no, I am not. I ought not to

“speak so. Dear old Mr. Grey has been kindness itself. I know he really likes me, and I like him more than I can say. Dr. Brett has been kind, too; he often drops in to see mother, who is not strong, and stays to talk. His wife is pleasant when we meet her. And Mr. Bracy is always friendly. We get on very well together. He is an interesting man, and talks well.”

“Yes, I know Bracy.” “Is that to be Penrose’s destiny?” was his inward question. “It might not be a bad thing, only Bracy is supposed to be an obstinate believer in clerical celibacy.” Aloud he added, “And I hope you were going to add *me* to that short list of yours?”

“Yes, indeed, you are so kind. But I have not seen you since we came here, and a friend one meets once in four months or so——”

“Come now, don’t be severe on me.

I own I have been to blame. I asked you to forgive me. I'll be a better friend than you think, if you'll trust me."

"I did not mean to say a word of blame. How could I? I never expected you to come. Redwood must be hateful to you now, and there is nothing to bring you here."

"Well, honestly, there *is* a certain painfulness about it. You are so truthful that you compel me to say things exactly as I feel them, which I seldom do, like the rest of the world. But still it is not the fact that I have *nothing* to bring me here. I have a new cousin now, who is a new friend as well, and I'm not going to let our friendship drop to the ground."

"Thank you," she said, and the matter-of-fact words had never seemed to mean so much. She put her heart into them. "All this time we have been talking about me, I am very egotistical. Are you come to stay with us, Geoffrey?"

“No. I am at Grey’s for to-night. But, if you will let me, I will spend this evening with you.”

Her face was bright with pleasure. Then she looked a little doubtful. “But we don’t dine late; we have only tea and supper. You will want your dinner.”

“Not at all. I lunched very well. I shall enjoy a hungry tea.”

“If you are sure you don’t mind, then, it will be very pleasant to have you. How is Miss Field? Mr. Grey told us she had been abroad all winter, and I am afraid not well.”

“No. Both facts are true, I am sorry to say. She has not been well, and I fear she will not be back for months yet.”

“That is bad for you. I am very sorry. And what have you been doing all this while?”

“Oh, nothing very interesting. I have had one or two briefs, been grinding on

in chambers, and finding everything more or less of a bore."

"I don't wonder, with Viola—may I call her Viola?—away."

Geoffrey felt a little prick of conscience. He had missed Viola very much. He longed for her back. Yet Penrose's idea of him was hardly complete. He had been able to trouble himself greatly about many quite unsentimental matters. His regrets had been for the loss of his prospects, as well as for the loss of Viola's sweet company. He knew himself to be an unideal person according to this young woman's standard. But he liked her to think well of him, and was conscious of a wish to deserve the friendship and gratitude she gave so frankly and freely, without a reserve or *arrière pensée* of any kind.

"Of course you must call her Viola," he said cordially. "I mean that you and she shall be great friends. You are very

unlike each other, which is as good a beginning to friendliness as Mrs. Malaprop's aversion is to matrimony."

"How are we so particularly unlike? Yet of course we are! That is a silly question—"

"To begin with, you have had such different lives. But you have different natures, too. Viola has always been a spoilt darling. I don't fancy any one ever set about trying to spoil *you*."

"No. It wasn't a thing that came to me," Penrose said, with a little smile, "I'm not the sort—I was never soft or pettable. Yes. I see how different we are."

The thought in her mind was, "She is the woman men fall in love with, they only make friends with me. If I had been a man, I should have been in love with Viola Field too, I believe."

Geoffrey had also his private mental comment on what had passed. He felt

that Penrose had been grown in the shade and his Viola had always had the sunny side of the wall. There are some things that grow strong and sweet without the sunshine, yet it is hardly fair to leave them in the cold ; he would be glad to let some light and warmth in upon his cousin's rather sombre days, if he could.

It was the hour that Mrs. Trevenna liked best in all the day, when Geoffrey and Penrose entered the room where she preferred to sit and have her meals instead of in the large drawing or dining room. In Mr. Trevenna's time it had been called the morning-room ; it was comfortably small and reminded the homely soul of days gone by. Here she enjoyed her tea. When alone, Jane took it with her. The kettle was brought in ; there were hot cakes, new-laid eggs, and such simple country dainties, which tasted better to Mrs. Trevenna's palate than the choicest viands her experienced and scornful cook

could produce. The little room looked cheerful enough, and its rather faded and almost shabby furniture helped to make it so to Mary Trevenna, who felt forlorn and uncomfortable in the midst of any grandeur. Penrose had filled it with artistic spoil from the woods, trails of red ivy, bowls of wood anemones, primroses and crocuses in moss. The sweet breath of the wilds mingled with the prosaic odours of tea and toast. Mrs. Trevenna was in the depths of her cushions and draperies beside the fire, Jane was busy with the kettle and teapot. When she saw that her daughter was followed into the room by that awful object "a gentleman"—a stranger he seemed to her—Mrs. Trevenna started and trembled a little. She was hardly reassured by Penrose, who hastened to tell her who it was.

"Mr. Trevenna—Mr. Geoffrey—I am surprised!" she faltered, holding out, then half withdrawing, a limp, nerveless hand.

It was not a warm greeting, but Geoffrey had the knack of winning women, young or old. He made himself at home, ate a hearty tea, talked and laughed with so much easy cordiality and charm that even Mrs. Trevenna thawed and smiled. Something of her old prettiness returned when she laughed, in two dimples that were almost childish, and her dark eyes, when enlivened, had some faint remnant of beauty. When she was dull and quiet as usual, it was difficult to imagine what charm there could ever have been in the pale, heavy, stout, inert woman to have caught the fastidious taste of Richard Trevenna. He had made up his mind to try what he could do to bring a little more brightness into Penrose's days, and for this purpose urged her mother to come to London for a time.

"Come up and do your spring shopping," he said insinuatingly; "ladies always want things this time of year. It's a shame not

to see London at its best. Lent will be over in ten days, and then it will begin to wake up. You could go to a nice quiet hotel or into lodgings, whichever you prefer. I could take you about, and introduce you to some nice people."

He little guessed at the terror such a prospect struck into Mrs. Trevenna's heart. To go into an hotel—amongst a lot of smart strangers—to be introduced to curious fine ladies, who would wonder at her incapacity! If he had suggested a turn or two on the treadmill it would have seemed much less dreadful. Penrose had an intuition as to what was passing through her mother's mind as she gasped and said nothing, because words were as difficult to her as actions. She slightly shook her head at Geoffrey, her eyes said, "Don't go on, it won't do." Aloud she declared that her mother did not like London, and was not strong enough to go about. She was best at home.

“But you—you would like a little change,” Geoffrey persisted, with some ruthlessness; for Mrs. Trevenna’s supine objection to be moved irritated him. “Penrose does not look bright,” he went on, looking straight in her mother’s face. “She is young, and has never had any fun yet—she ought to have. It is not lively at Redwood, I know, and Penrose seems only to see elderly people. I want her to have a fling.”

“Don’t, Geoffrey,” the girl murmured, flushing, half with vexation, half with a newly awakened longing which she feared to harbour. “I am quite contented.”

Her mother looked at her with a slowly dawning perception. To be sure, Penrose *was* young; possibly it *was* a dull life when one was not old and weary, and afraid of every change and novelty!

“I don’t think, really, I could go to London,” she began, in her drawling,

toneless voice ; "but it does seem a pity for Pen."

"Something must be managed for her without bothering you," he said, in a tone of resolute firmness, which impressed Mrs. Trevenna.

"Do you really think she doesn't look well?" she went on, pursuing the idea he had given her with slow persistence.

"Mother, I am perfectly well, whatever Geoffrey thinks," Penrose said angrily. He smiled, with a teasing enjoyment of the newly discovered fact that Penrose could be angry. He liked her all the better for it. In truth she had never had an even temper, though she had forced herself into a habit of controlling it, and her life lately had not had the effect of making it more serene. "Don't let's talk any more about foolish plans or about me," she went on rapidly, and with heat. "It is ridiculous to imagine

there's anything the matter, I'm always well."

Geoffrey said no more, but he had not the least intention of abandoning his plans for his cousin's benefit. Mr. Grey had a comfortable, elderly, widowed sister, who lived in an old-fashioned street in Chelsea. Geoffrey worked upon the old bachelor with such skill as to persuade him to come up to town for a sale of books to be held at Easter, and to stay with this Mrs. Morrison, and it needed little more suggestion to induce him to take Penrose with him. He worked on Mr. Grey's tender heart with representations of the dull, dreary life the girl had been leading in that big house with a stupid, invalidish mother, who had not an original idea in the world, for her only companion. It was enough to make anybody melancholy for life, he declared, and she ought to be shown something of the world, and have her chances of enjoyment like other girls.

Mr. Grey was quite upset by the picture. He lost no time in getting an invitation from his sister Martha, and broached the subject to Penrose when she came next to see him. She declared at first that it was impossible for her to accept such kindness. She could not leave her mother, who was certainly in a feeble state of health. But she was overruled. Mrs. Trevenna herself seemed so genuinely pleased and roused by the idea, for Geoffrey's words had dwelt in her mind; Jane was so urgent, and had an argument in answer to every objection, waxing indignant at the mere suggestion that Mrs. Trevenna wanted any one while *she* was by, that Penrose had to own that all the difficulties were imaginary, and that for once her pleasure might be consulted.

It was a new sensation, as new as finding herself made much of by Mr. Grey; by his kind old sister, who was a roundabout bunch of smiling, rubicund good-nature;

and by Geoffrey, who came the very first evening to Chelsea to see her, and calmly announced his intention of teaching his cousin to be frivolous, and have a rattling good time for once in her life. Penrose looked at her plain, country-made gown, and smiled significantly, with rather a doubtful shake of the head.

“Yes,” he went on, with cool audacity; “I know what you’re thinking—that you’re not dressed for the part. No more you are. Mrs. Morrison, if you are, as I suppose you to be, a real good Samaritan, you’ll drive my cousin to Regent Street to-morrow, and make her spend money. Her style must continue to be grand simplicity, or it will not suit her; but it must be Regent Street simplicity, and cost a good deal. I’m convinced she will find she has a lurking vanity somewhere, if only you will try and bring it to the front. She wants several new dresses, bonnets, and heaps of things to match.

I'll call and tell you what I think of the result."

Mrs. Morrison chuckled her fat laugh, and promised to do her best. They would spend the next morning, as he suggested, in Regent Street.





CHAPTER VIII.

“**W**ELL, Penrose, how did the shopping go off?”

Geoffrey had *carte blanche* to dine and spend the evening at Chelsea while his cousin was in town, and since he liked the trio he found there, and had no other house to lounge in, he availed himself of Mrs. Morrison's hospitality largely. It was the half-hour before dinner, when all properly educated young ladies ought to have been dressing; but Penrose, who knew nothing of the code of society, had not perceived any necessity—since they were spending the evening at home—for

putting on her one thin black gown, but was sitting reading in her simple walking costume. Geoffrey intended gently to educate her out of her unconventionality. Mrs. Morrison was much too easy-going to care what her guest put on, and Mr. Grey too blind to perceive whether what she wore was silk or wool.

"Oh, all right," Penrose answered rather indifferently. "The shops were terrifically grand and dear."

"I hope you bought a lot of pretty things. You ought to have plenty to spend *now*."

"I have thirty pounds a year. I am sure that is enough."

"Thirty pounds!" He raised his eyebrows. "Viola says a girl can barely *clothe* on sixty."

"As if it could be right for me to spend sixty on myself," Penrose said brusquely; then hastily added, "it is quite different for *her*, of course."

“ But why—why ? You always say that sort of thing.”

“ Because it is always true ; because I am not, and never shall be, of the world of society.”

“ And I say you ought to be, and shall be. You are morbid about it, Penrose. Remember you are now an heiress. Put a proper valuation on yourself, and others will take your word for you.”

She shook her head. “ No, Geoffrey, I cannot and I will not. Money makes no difference. I am not morbid. I do not care about the fact, but it *is* a fact that I am not in Viola’s world—not in society, in short.”

“ Pshaw ! Well, now, what did you buy ? I am going to take you really to see what London is like, and you must do me and yourself credit. *I* think it matters a good deal how you look.”

“ I got a grey cloth dress—rather pretty, but plain. I wonder they dared charge

six guineas for it; it did not cost two. And a hat to match. Mrs. Morrison said they were all right, and I thought them nice."

"And no evening things?"

"No. I've got a black thin sort of affair. What else do I want?"

"My dear cousin, you can't get on with *one* evening gown. We are going to dissipate."

"What should I have, then?" Penrose asked, laughing.

Geoffrey tried to remember Viola's very simplest toilettes.

"Oh, something silky and soft—something white. Will you let me go with you again to-morrow afternoon to Regent Street, and help you spend some more money? I have nothing to do that matters. We'll have a jolly frivolous afternoon, and finish up with the Park. Shall you like that? And on Thursday I have four stalls for the Lyceum."

“Oh, Geoffrey ! I have always wanted to go to the theatre.”

“Well, I’m glad there’s one frivolity you are inclined for. I was half afraid I had made a bad shot again.”

“Is it a frivolity to see Shakespeare acted ? I shouldn’t have thought so.”

“Well, perhaps not. But it involves some. For instance, you must put on this one evening dress, and you ought to have a pretty wrap. We’ll buy that to-morrow. I hope you brought money enough to town with you. I am afraid Mr. Hamley must be hoarding it all up.”

“I have twenty pounds left. Mother will give me more if I want it ; but I hate to spend so much on myself.”

“I believe you do. You must get out of that.”

“You see, there are so many better things to spend it on. It is ridiculous for me to set up to be fine. I should only be the jay in peacock’s feathers.”

"But you should do as other girls do," Geoffrey said, as gravely as if he were laying down a moral axiom. "You don't want to be remarkable."

"I don't want to disgrace any one, certainly," she said quickly, blushing a little. "Mrs. Morrison is so kind, she never finds fault; but she must think me queer and uncouth. I shall be obliged to you if you tell me what I ought to do while I am here. I am quite uncivilized, you know."

"Oh, that's all nonsense. You only need to be just yourself to be miles beyond the common ruck of girls. Still, frankly, in some respects you do need to be told—there are things everybody does. It sounds awfully priggish," he added, breaking off into a laugh, "and we are all hide-bound by idiotic restrictions. There is no moral law that I know of, for instance, to compel people to change for dinner—yet they do."

"Yes, to be sure!" Penrose cried, as she glanced at him, as he sat astride a chair opposite her in his uncreased evening suit and glossy linen. "I never thought. You are dressed, and I have never changed since we came in. I can do that if Mrs. Morrison likes. *You* are magnificent." Her frank tone and glance of smiling raillery made him laugh.

"I am glad you admire me. Well, I can't return the compliment; you are *not* magnificent. I don't believe you have any small fineries, Penrose; have you any ornaments at all?"

"I have two brooches, and a watch and chain," she answered literally.

"No rings, necklaces, bracelets, no jingles of any kind? No, it wouldn't suit you to flash and jingle. But don't you *like* pretty things?"

"I like to see them—on pretty people."

"And, pray, are you ugly?"

Penrose did not answer. She was wondering suddenly whether she had underrated herself, how she struck Geoffrey. His eyes seemed to say some flattering things; but she had absolutely hardly ever considered the question of her own appearance. No one, man or woman, had ever told her pleasant things about herself, and she generally dressed and wound up her long hair carelessly without a glance at the looking-glass. She felt as if she would like to compel him to tell her exactly what he thought of her; but she was afraid, first of seeming foolish, secondly of not hearing the precise truth. She intended for the first time in her life to be photographed, since her mother wished it, and the picture of her own face might tell her what she wanted to know.

The next afternoon, Geoffrey called for her in a hansom; he justified all such extravagance to himself to-day, by the

plea that he must make it jolly for Penrose.

They visited a shop or two first where he gave his opinion like an oracle, and Penrose meekly submitted to buying, though the price appalled her, a white poplin gown, an opera cloak, some gloves, and small articles of finery. She was obstinate, however, about the make; it was to be perfectly plain, high almost to the throat, and long sleeved. Geoffrey knew nothing of course of these orders, but his good taste would have sanctioned them. A *décolleté* style would have been perfectly unsuited to the order of womanhood to which Penrose belonged. A Britomart in gauze and lace could not have looked more out of place. When she came down from interviewing the dressmaker he gave her a little case; when she opened it, she saw a plain gold coil for the neck. She coloured high.

“For me? not surely for *me*, Geoffrey?”

"Yes," he said, with careless generosity, "only a small cousinly remembrance."

"You ought not," she rejoined, in a very low voice, with the bright colour still on her face; "it is not right of you."

"Why not. Are those the sort of thanks you give a fellow for wanting to please you?"

"It sounds ungrateful, I dare say; but I do thank you. It is very, very kind; but——"

"But what?" he asked, as they were outside the shop. "What's wrong with the thing? Don't you like it? You told me you had no ornaments, and I thought it was too bad."

"It is *very* pretty, too pretty for me, and too—too good. You ought not to have bought it, Geoffrey."

"Why not?"

"I thought you said you were poor," she said, in a low voice. "And it ought not to have been for *me*, who——"

"Who what?" he asked, rather impatiently. "Tell me what you mean, please."

"Who robbed you," she said, still lower, not looking at him.

"Stuff. You did not. I bear no malice to any one. I didn't think you imagined I did!"

"Oh, I do not! You have been only too generous. But I know it must seem so. And I can't help it. Forgive me if I am rude, Geoffrey, but I can't but feel that you ought not to spend money on me."

"But I like to do so. When one has a friend, one naturally likes to make some gift."

"Then you must let me give *you* one," she cried, with sudden vivacity, "only I've not the least idea what men want, and I suppose you've got everything."

"Well, I have most of the usual things—studs, silver cigar-case and match-box,

all the rest of it ; but there are one or two things I desire madly."

"Are there ? Please tell me one. After all this buying for one's self, it would be delightful to spend something on anybody else. I am going to take mother a photograph of myself in a silver frame, and I must get Jane something nice—now what do you really want, Geoffrey ?"

"Well, I have just lost my favourite pencil-case, and I am miserable without it !"

"What was it like ? One of those ?" she cried eagerly, pausing at a jeweller's, and pointing out some gold pen-and-pencil cases.

"Oh no, only humble silver."

"I had rather give you gold, as you did me."

"What a bartering spirit !"

"No. I did not mean it in that way. But I had rather, Geoffrey, if I have enough."

She looked in her purse at once, and, finding apparently that she was richer than she supposed, she went straight into the shop, bought the pencil-case with extreme promptitude, and gave it him with a radiant smile.

“Thank you,” he said, putting it in his pocket; “I did not mean you really to do it, but I shall prize it. I won’t lose this one.”

He made her next have tea and some delectable French cakes, and when she asked him what there was to pay, in her direct fashion, would not hear of her sharing it.

“But I had rather,” she said, looking a little vexed, “it makes me feel mean.”

“That must be a new sensation, and new ideas are good for people. Now, please, don’t be so severe and uncompromising, this is my shout, as the Yankees say; you really must pocket your pride as well as your purse, and let me be

extravagant with a clear conscience just for to-day. I'll economize to-morrow on bread and cheese."

"I don't believe you could eat bread and cheese! They don't seem in your line."

"Oh yes, I can. Don't come the severely virtuous over me too strong all at once. I must reform gradually. Now let's go and have a turn in the Park. We're in for frivolity this afternoon, you know."

They might be determined on frivolity, yet when they were sitting in the Park, neither seemed inclined to be gay or talkative any longer. Penrose was watching everything and everybody with serious scrutiny; her large grave wondering eyes seemed desirous of taking in every detail of the shifting phantasmagoria; the passing to and fro, the ripple of talk and laughter, the rustling movement, the surface brilliancy of the crowd all lighted by a pale, half-

watery sun seemed neither a dream nor a reality.

Geoffrey was silent ; he looked dissatisfied and rather melancholy now that there was no demand made upon him, he seemed to fall into a reverie that was uncheerful enough.

After a while Penrose glanced at him and caught this expression of weary discontent on his dark, clear-cut, fastidious face—the typical look of a man who has exhausted most sensations.

“Are you vexed about anything ?” she asked him suddenly.

He started a little, and gave a short laugh. “My dear cousin, you are very alarming with those direct shafts of yours. Vexed ? N-no ; not exactly. What makes you suppose I am ?”

“You looked just then as if something had gone wrong.”

“Something ! As a rule most things go wrong.”

"Oh no, surely not; surely it doesn't seem so to *you*?"

"Why not to me?"

"Everything goes right with you—I thought so, at least."

"Did you? Well, it never struck me in that way exactly. Did you imagine I had no vexations?"

"No, but that you must be very happy."

"What have I to make me so very happy?"

"Viola," Penrose said calmly and directly.

"But just at present I haven't got Viola. And what is more, if her father can manage it, I never shall have her."

"Geoffrey! What do you mean? What should come between you when you care for each other?"

"You Arcadian!" he returned bitterly, with a look half scorn, half gloom. "What a little, what an infinite little you know about the world! What should come

between us ? Why money, money, money, the one thing that turns the pivot of the world. Mr. Field's existence knows no other important factor ; and he never liked me, or, at least, what he considers the essentials of me. Don't you know that money makes the man ? ”

“ But all that won't matter. I mean, of course, she will do as she likes. It would be pleasanter for her to marry some one her father wished ; but there is nothing real to come between you. It isn't as if you were too poor to marry ; then, I can see, it might be a difficulty.”

“ And what do *you* call ‘ too poor ’ ? ” he asked drily.

“ Well, I suppose, in London, to be comfortable, you would want six or seven hundred a year.”

He laughed out at that. “ Which, in Mr. Field's estimation, would be simple beggary. He *might* call it enough for his daughter's pin money.”

“ You don’t really mean that ? ”

“ Upon my honour, I do. I am speaking the plain facts, as they appear to Viola’s father.”

“ But not to Viola ? ”

“ Viola ! She knows nothing, absolutely nothing of the value of money. She has only had to ask for what she wants. I dare say her dress may have cost from two to three hundred a year—that is putting it low.”

“ Three hundred ! We lived on that comfortably at Copsley.”

“ You see, my dear cousin, there is a good deal in this society world undreamt of in your philosophy.”

“ But, if she were married to you, she would not mind living differently—surely she would not.”

Penrose spoke almost as if pleading with him for an assurance. For the first time to-day it had struck her, and with a painful shock, that her mother’s marriage,

her own existence, had been a real injury and loss to Geoffrey. With her ignorance of the habits and demands of the world in which he had lived, she had thought of him as possessing amply enough for his own happiness, and had concluded, with the stoical spirit of a philosopher which was due to the Spartan simplicity of her own bringing up, that to be a little less well off would be the best thing to stimulate and rouse him to energy and purpose. She looked at him wistfully ; his gloomy air pained her, the panorama passed by unnoticed while she pondered schemes for making him happy. It was so easy to put up with things one's self, she thought, but it did not seem tolerable that Geoffrey and Viola should suffer. They had appeared to her as peculiar people, born to be happy.

“What do you mean to do, then ?” she asked timidly, after a rather long pause.

He shrugged his shoulders. “What

can I do? I am perfectly ready to marry and live on a small income myself; but I know very well old Field will never consent. We must wait, I suppose. Of course he is rich enough—a perfect Dives—that's just the nuisance of the thing. Even supposing he cared to give her a fortune—which he would not do with the prospect of me as a son-in-law—I should not care to live on my wife's money. And Viola wasn't made to be poor!”

“It was very good of you not to hate us, since we have made all this difference to you!” Penrose broke out impetuously.

Geoffrey started. “Penrose, I beg your pardon. I was not thinking to whom I was talking. You asked me questions which led me on. I hope you do not suppose I was talking at you. Hate you! No, I'm not such a cad, or such a fool. My uncle's money was his own. I lived too long on the hopes of stepping into

his shoes. I should have done better all round if I hadn't made sure of not being obliged to work. He would very likely have left me more if Viola had not been James Field's daughter. There was some quarrel between them long ago, or rather my uncle bore Mr. Field a grudge for some transactions with a friend, and he never forgave or forgot a grudge. So, you see, it could not be helped, for I prefer Viola to Redwood, or my uncle's money."

"Of course you do, but——"

"Come, don't let's talk like this any more! I brought you out for an afternoon's frivolity, and I'm boring you with grumbles. Hang money! let's enjoy ourselves, and leave the morrow to take care of itself."

He forced her to notice, admire, and ridicule the passing crowds, and laughed at her outspoken horror at some of the sights she saw. The bedizened old ladies, trying to look the age of their grand-

daughters, the paint, the hair dye, the sophisticated children who had never known childhood, the vacant faces and swaggering gait of some of the much-collared and wrist-banded youths ; these were all new types to the girl, who vainly looked about her for something more ideal. At first she would not believe that these lovely complexions guarded by cobwebby veils, and pencilled eyebrows, owed anything to any hand but Mother Nature's, or that such brilliant hair was not a peculiarity produced by the London atmosphere, or some other subtle cause ; but when reluctantly persuaded to see Art in it all, she sighed as if oppressed. Falsehood of all kinds was so abhorrent to her that it was positively painful, a real distress to her to meet with it.

Geoffrey laughed at her, but good-naturedly. He felt somehow braced and refreshed, as with a breath of free moorland air, by contact with her brave and

honest spirit. It was a pleasant thing to be sure of any one, absolutely sure, and this impression of complete good faith was one which Penrose never failed to produce on such as really learnt to know her as she was in the truthful integrity which breathed about her like an atmosphere, and looked straight out of those clear, pure grey eyes, which met the world with the valiant challenge of a Sir Galahad.





CHAPTER IX.

IT was all very well for Geoffrey abruptly to dismiss the subject of his troubles from conversation ; but Penrose could not so banish the remembrance of what he had said in those few brief sentences. She could not bear the feeling, which yet she could not shake off, that she, or her mother, with whom she chose to identify herself, had done him an injury. To be less rich than he expected was nothing—she disdained to think of this as a real hardship to any man worth anything ; but to lose Viola—if *that* were a result, that meant a real disaster !

Penrose had an inward idea of Viola,

formed on slight grounds, but delicately coloured by imagination, as of something very sweet and charming. She liked to think of her and Geoffrey, as some lovers out of a poem or romance. She was only stern and matter-of-fact in her dealings with herself ; she had a half-pathetic tenderness for other girls, those who were pretty, frail, and dainty like Geoffrey's Viola. She pondered and puzzled over the problem of helping them to their happiness, since she had innocently robbed them of it, or at least delayed and hindered it. She could only get near a solution with the aid of her mother's counsellor and business manager, Mr. Hamley, and decided on sending him a line to call and see her. She had made the effort, which Mrs. Trevenna was incapable of, and had never even attempted, to understand something of the state of their affairs ; and had studied conscientiously to comprehend a little of the mysteries of stocks,

shares, and percentages which overwhelmed and appalled her mother. Mr. Hamley had conceived some respect for her in consequence ; he admired a woman who could master anything of business. His dry, legal, critical mind was not formed to appreciate ideal qualities, but he liked people " who had common sense."

He also liked her direct way of going into things, without waste of time or foolishness, and when she let him know at once and without circumlocution that she wanted, if it were possible, to make over some money to Geoffrey Trevenna, he did not openly ridicule her Quixotism, though he allowed himself one dry smile of amusement.

"And what did you want to give him, if it were feasible?"

"About six or seven thousand pounds," Penrose answered, with prompt decision.

"Phew! What a sum! My dear young lady, there are two difficulties that bar the

way to any action. The first is, that the money is your mother's, not yours."

"My mother would not object. Our income is much larger, as you know, than we can spend, and what I mentioned would be no loss to her."

"But the second objection is insuperable. Geoffrey Trevenna would never accept it. He is a proud fellow—and if he were not, he has too much gentlemanly feeling."

"Could not it be done in some way that would not offend his pride?"

"Not possibly, that I see."

"Has my mother any power to make a will?"

"No. She has only a life interest in your father's property."

"And it would be no good for *me* to leave him anything; I am too young," Penrose said, half to herself; she was frowning with perplexity and earnestness.

"Can nothing be done, Mr. Hamley?"

“I don’t see that it can. You are unnecessarily vexing yourself, Miss Trevenna. Geoffrey has enough to live on; and, if he is obliged to work, so much the better for him.”

“Yes, but—if it cannot be, it cannot. But I have real reason for wishing I might give him this sum, Mr. Hamley. It would be a great relief. I feel it would be only fair and just.”

“One thing I can do, perhaps, and that is to put a little business into his hands. Geoffrey Trevenna has been an idle, pleasure-loving fellow all his time, but he is not a fool. I can put a brief or two in his way; and, if he does his best, he may get on some day at the Bar; but to make a fortune there is next to impossible till he is double his present age. What makes you trouble yourself about him just at this present time, if it is not impertinent to ask you, Miss Trevenna?”

“I like him,” Penrose answered quietly.

“ He has been very generous and kind to me ; and, besides, I am afraid this loss of the fortune that was thought to be his may make difficulties in the way of his marriage.”

Mr. Hamley shrugged his shoulders, with a dry smile. “ *There*, I have no doubt, you are right. Everybody knows that Mr. Field is extremely disgusted with the turn things have taken. I shall not be surprised if he puts that heavy foot of his down on the affair ; but whether that will be a misfortune or not—— H’m !” he finished, with another shrug.

“ What do you mean ? ” Penrose demanded, with almost fierce directness. “ Why should it not be a misfortune, when he ”—she could not utter the word *loves* under the cold eyes of the lawyer—“ when he cares for her ? ”

“ Oh, Miss Viola herself is a nice girl enough, though not the wife for any one but a millionaire, I should say. It is

Field *père* I object to. Since you insist on the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of everything, I will tell you that he does not bear too high a character, only he is rich enough to pass. Money covers more sins, I'm afraid, than charity."

His cynicism, and that inflexible attitude of his of unbelief in disinterested goodness, which she could not help feeling, was grating to Penrose at all times; and she was saddened by his evident disbelief in the happiness that she had hoped waited for Geoffrey when the time came. She said no more. Of what use was it? An impassable barrier seemed to have been placed between her and her desire of benefiting Geoffrey by some restoration of his uncle's property. She knew that he would not accept it as a gift, freely, gladly though she would give it; and, if Mr. Hamley could hit upon no scheme for endowing him with it in any other way, she must submit to being richer than

she wanted to be—to know that money could bring her very little, and might do all which he wanted. It was the irony of Fate; she and her mother, who did not know how to enjoy it, were saddled with a fortune that was above their needs, and Geoffrey was discontented for the want of their superfluity. Well, since this way of bestowing was closed, Penrose looked about her for others. To be rich and do no good to any one seemed in her eyes to be positively criminal. She opened her mind to the sound which runs through London, beneath all its laughter, for those who have ears to hear—the sound of the wailing and the curses from those who are sinking in the deep water which bears lightly upon its surface the gay freight of vessels which carry the fortunate few from prosperity to prosperity on the smiling mirror which shows them nothing of the gloom of the depths where lie the bones of the shipwrecked and the lost treasures of the storm.

Geoffrey, however, was not satisfied that she should be too much in earnest. He had determined on educating her into the ways of his world, and took considerable pains to make her learn to be light-hearted. He sought out a coadjutor in the person of a Mrs. Spencer, a friend of his, and a slight connection of Viola's, the cheerful, energetic, agreeable wife of a mild, elderly gentleman, who provided the fortune which she benevolently spent on her numerous acquaintances and on her own amusements. She was one of those women whom everybody calls charming, who had managed to conquer all natural disadvantages—such as a plain face and an obscure origin—with a zeal and ability which could accomplish marvels. She had so good a figure, such perfect taste, and so clever a maid, that no one ever called her ugly; they looked at her admirable costumes instead of her sallow, large-featured face, and declared her *chic*.

Ugly women can always manage to look *chic*, unless they are too fat, if they take the trouble.

Geoffrey called upon this admirable woman one Sunday afternoon, and, by a fortunate chance, found her alone, yawning over tea and a solid magazine.

"Mrs. Spencer, you are the kindest and most benevolent of women."

"Well, what do you want of my kindness and benevolence *now*, Geoffrey? What do you intend to blarney me into doing?"

"Nothing very alarming. My cousin, Miss Trevenna, is staying in town, and I should be very much obliged to you for taking her up a little."

"Your '*cousin*, Miss Trevenna'? Who's she? I did not know you had any cousins."

"Oh yes, my dear Mrs. Spencer, you do know, if you think. I told you of the appearance on the scene of a

Mrs. Trevenna when my uncle Richard died."

"Oh! Then there is a daughter, too? Yes; I vaguely remember. So you are really magnanimous enough not only to forgive the cousin's existence, but to interest yourself in it? Is she very beautiful or fascinating, then? What will Viola say to this solicitude of yours?"

"What fools women are!" was Geoffrey's inward reflection; "they at once imagine one must be in love with any woman for whom one has a friendship!" Aloud he said, with perfect nonchalance, "There is nothing in the world for Viola to say. Pray do not let your imagination loose. My cousin is neither beautiful nor fascinating; but I happen to like her, and since she has led a remarkably dull, secluded life with a heavy, invalidish mother, I am anxious for her to get some pleasure and variety. Now, will you be

good enough to call and ask her to your house? She is staying with a good-natured old soul, a Mrs. Morrison. I don't think you know her; but I believe you have heard of her brother, Mr. Grey, the master of —— College."

"Oh yes, your uncle's great friend, wasn't he? My nephew Reggie is at —— College. Well, I will call, if you really wish it very much, and, as it happens, I can ask Miss Trevenna here to dine and sleep a night or two next week. I have a small dinner on, and, as a couple have fallen off, I have room for you and her, if you will honour us."

"Only too charmed. I hope you will like my cousin. She isn't in the least of the order of the girls one meets, but she is a good sort."

"And of course knows how to behave, though she has not been, you say, in society much?"

Geoffrey was half amused, half irritated

by the question as he thought of Penrose's dignified unconsciousness, the perfect refinement of a mind empty of deceit and vanity.

"You need not be at all afraid," he answered, with a rather forced smile. "She is *unlike* the rest of the world, certainly ; but I'll answer for her not being a barbarian. I have seen a duchess considerably less lady-like."

"A plain, *gauche*, quiet sort of Quaker creature, I suppose," Mrs. Spencer concluded ; and, with her usual easy good-nature, she fell in with Geoffrey's request without any more objections. She was energetic in the pursuit of her profession of woman of society, and called at once on Miss Trevenna, perhaps spurred somewhat by curiosity to see the interloper who had cost Geoffrey his fortune, and who, the world whispered, had little right to his name at all. She expected, after his description of her as neither beautiful

nor fascinating, to see a plain, awkward young person who had neither manners nor charm. The tall, upright, fine-looking girl, so simply unconscious of herself as to have a kind of grace—the grace that no affectation can ever attain to—with the low-toned contralto voice that neither slurred nor mispronounced the few reserved sentences it spoke, and that something of nobility, of grandeur, which even a shallow worldling could hardly miss in her whole bearing and expression, surprised Mrs. Spencer and frightened away the patronizing condescension she had assumed as a greeting appropriate to the occasion.

Penrose was calmly, not effusively, grateful for the visit and invitation to dine and sleep a couple of nights in Hertford Street, where her cousin would escort her. After a little chat, Mrs. Spencer departed, leaving Penrose in some wonder at her graciousness, which she decided to put

down as another small item in her debt to Geoffrey.

Though she had a humble opinion of herself, as a social entity, Penrose was too straightforward and unegotistic to be shy, and she was as composed in Mrs. Spencer's smart, well-filled drawing-room, when she entered it dressed for her first dinner-party, as Geoffrey liked to see her. She looked distinguished, too, partly by her very unlikeness to the other ladies, two or three matrons and a sprinkling of girls who were assembled. Her perfectly plain, heavy white gown, unrelieved by flowers, ribbon, or any ornament but Geoffrey's gold necklet, high to her firmly poised column of a throat which supported the finely shaped head and mass of brown hair, suited her, as anything external that is perfectly in harmony with the inner self must do. Its clean whiteness, without a spot or soil, and the straight long folds in which it swept to

her feet, somehow expressed the character which her grave, strong face showed in every line.

She was well placed at dinner by a middle-aged water-colour painter, whose name she knew at once. Before the soup was finished she plunged straight into questions as to his pictures and his art, which showed her to be at home with her subject.

Mr. Lyons, who had already been attracted by her looks, which satisfied his artistic sense as a well-played sonata pleases a musician, was quick to respond. He taxed her with knowing a great deal about his craft, and though she would not allow that she had any true knowledge at all, he felt convinced that she was not merely amateurish, like a host of young ladies. She had spent hours at the National Gallery since she had been in London, and was to wait for the opening of the Spring Exhibitions. It was evident

that the whole world of painting was of intense interest to her. She was hungry to hear about pictures, different schools, and all the technicalities of the profession.

Geoffrey, who was carrying on a perfunctory kind of surface flirtation, with considerable boredom inwardly, with a mature young lady whose display of chest, back, and arms had made Penrose feel hot when she glanced her way, was amused at intervals to watch Penrose and her partner. They were in eager conversation. She seemed to have forgotten her dinner, and he his other neighbour. She passed every dish, and, with one hand clenched on the table, had thrown herself into the interest of a *real* talk. The painter was a middle-aged, grizzled, rather ugly widower. No one ever accused him of much admiration for the other sex. It was plainly not what even the readiest to scent such affairs could call a "flirtation," but the couple were mutually absorbed

and drawn to each other by the strong sympathy of tastes, which makes the keenest pleasure of intellectual association. Mr. Lyons invited her to visit his studio. She accepted eagerly, with a warmth of thanks which almost touched him. It was not much civility to show a handsome young girl, but it seemed much to her.

"I have never had the chance before," she said. "A studio has always appeared a kind of paradise to me."

"Why don't you make one for yourself, then? I'm sure you might be an artist. I don't mean a manufacturer of pot-boilers, but one who has a delight in learning to express herself."

"I never could. I am not original, I am sure. I have done very little, but it has only been just trying to copy faithfully what I saw. I do not think I have imagination enough to paint a picture. I have *seen* one sometimes."

"You have barely begun. Give yourself up to it—if you can, I mean, of course ; I know nothing of your circumstances—and see if the secret is not somewhere in you."

"Ah," Penrose said, drawing a long breath, "it would be life !"

She was silent, and one thought after another left, as it were, a changing shadow that flitted like clouds across her candid face. She realized, by the leap of her heart towards this ideal life which suddenly hovered like a rainbow across the horizon, how poor and restricted hers had been, how fettered and starved by small cares, duties, and limitations. To be an artist, to express herself, to breathe the free air of a great pursuit, ah, *that* was bliss, that was life indeed !

"You don't live in London ? You have not, perhaps, had the best opportunities ?" Mr. Lyons went on, watching her with a fatherly or comrade-like interest, quite

untouched by any disturbing element. "Couldn't you manage to get them? I feel convinced you have the real thing in you."

"It never seemed possible to me to be an artist before—to give myself up to it. I have not had the chance."

"Well, if you get it, and I can help you, only let me do so, Miss Trevenna. We have had a delightful hour together, haven't we? Perhaps that's a conceited question, yet I'd like to think you have enjoyed our talk nearly as much as I have."

"A great deal more, I should think," Penrose returned, giving him a frank, kind smile of thanks as the ladies rose to leave the room. "My first dinner-party has been a treat to me."

"Her 'first dinner-party!'" mused the painter. "Where can she have been riz? I should like to try and make a picture of her as some heroic character—a fine

nature quite unhandled by the common herd."

"Is that young lady any relation of yours, Trevenna?" he asked Geoffrey, moving into the vacant chair empty of the mature young lady with the back.

"Yes; my cousin."

"Didn't know you had one. Has she come from any remote region suddenly?"

"No. Only from a quiet country life."

"It must have been quiet. Well, she is a refreshing contrast to the rest. It's like a breath of gorse and heather after this sickly scent of Ess. Bouquet and the rest. And the courage of that costume that is just artistically right for her, strikes one. She ought to be painted as some Middle Age martyr or heroine—Joan of Arc, or one of her sort, eh?"

"When I first saw her she reminded

me strongly of a picture I saw somewhere—wasn't it Brooks' ?—of Britomart, where she is taking off her helmet and letting her hair scatter. Of course the hair should be golden—Spenser's one idea of a heroine, if virtuous, is golden-haired."

"Ay, Britomart. That would do. Well, she is a girl to trust to the death. I don't think I ever saw a more true, intrepid glance."

"You've made a conquest of Lyons, Penrose," Geoffrey said to her, when he returned to the drawing-room, to find his cousin a little unsociably withdrawn from the other ladies, with whom she had nothing in common, and who thought her *outrée* and *farouche*, as they expressed it, with a book on the table before her.

"He was very good to me. We had a very interesting talk," she answered quietly, "if that is what you mean."

"Oh, don't look severe. I'm not

accusing either of you of anything so sub-lunary as a flirtation ; but he talks very prettily about you."

"He has asked me to go to his studio, and he will take me to several others," she said, passing by the compliment with supreme indifference. Her eyes were bright with pleasure.

Geoffrey had never seen her look either so animated or so attractive. He seemed to see what she might have been had her girlhood been unshadowed. It gave him a brotherly satisfaction to see her.

"Well, that's right, since you are interested in such things. I'm glad you and Lyons have hit it off so well. And how do you get on with Mrs. Spencer?"

"She is exceedingly kind," Penrose answered warmly. "She makes me feel quite at home, and she has asked me to stay as long as I like."

“That’s all right, too, then, and I’m glad,” Geoffrey said ; and, as a song began, he moved away from her, and went to make himself agreeable elsewhere.





CHAPTER X.

IN spite of his power of appearing in society as usual, and playing the part of a pleasant complaisant guest anywhere, a power that becomes almost mechanical with the man about town, Geoffrey was not in spirits or in a good humour with himself or other people. Viola wrote seldom, to the impatience of a lover, at any rate, and every letter that came was sure to be distinctly disappointing. She was enjoying herself immensely, and was very well. Mrs. Williams was "awfully kind," she could not do enough for them. There were excursions planned

for every day. Mr. Lees had a boat on the lake, and so on. She expected they would be in town the beginning of June ; but it was not certain. There were, of course, little oases of affection in the midst of this uninteresting matter. Viola used the stereotyped expressions—he was her “ dearest boy,” her “ darling Geoff ; ” but her whole style was somehow apt to be stiff, unreal, flat. She was not to blame ; her education had not been of a kind to make a fine letter-writer of her. She *talked* often in a slipshod, slangy, illiterate fashion, but her low, sweet, pathetic voice enriched every phrase ; with her soft eyes for emphasis, and the light clinging touches of her small white hands to embellish them, there was nothing left for a man who loved her to desire. The same words and thoughts translated in ink on paper, bereft of the grace of her presence, often struck cold, poor, and dull. He wanted to see, to hold, to caress her ; sometimes the want

amounted to an aching longing, but when business pressed or pleasure was on hand it was only just felt, and scarcely hurt him. He did not doubt her ; he was not jealous of Mr. Lees, with all his money, and her father's wishes to back him ; he knew Viola was in love with him himself, poor as he was and disinherited, and had no liking for the stout, noisy, middle-aged wooer. Yet to have had some better assurance than those bald, ill-expressed letters would have been a satisfaction. It seemed a long while still to look for the time of reunion. He did not see much of Mr. Field, the only member of the family at whom he could get, and when they met he was not cordial, in fact distinctly snubbing, full of disagreeable advice, and more disagreeable contempt. Geoffrey had never liked the man, and he positively hated him at this time.

The day of Mrs. Spencer's little dinner he had run against Mr. Field in the City,

where he was rushing along with his ferociously business-like air on.

“Oh, Trevenna! I rather wanted to have a few words with you. Have you lunched? No. Then come in here. I haven’t either.”

Geoffrey followed him into the restaurant with the sulky acquiescence of a boy in the clutches of his schoolmaster. He never had any but *mauvais quart-d’heures* now with Mr. Field, and stiffened himself in preparation for a cold douche. Viola’s father was rather more unpleasant than usual; he ran on in his egotistical bragging fashion—he always managed to make every statement sound like a boast. He was full of his wife’s and Viola’s good luck in having such a charming hostess as Mrs. Williams, who, being a rich childless widow, was worth cultivating, begad! They were in clover—it was deuced lucky, too, that Lees was able to stay there. Lees was as good a fellow as ever breathed,

let alone his money, which was not to be despised neither. All this Geoffrey endured with civil nonchalance, which always annoyed the other man. "Trevenna's damned cool airs of superiority," as he called them, were intolerable to him, and unaccountable, since he was "so cursed poor."

He suddenly fixed his prominent light eyes full on Geoffrey, and demanded in a tone of challenge—

"I've heard—never mind how—that you've been selling out capital; is that so?"

"I really don't see how that concerns any one but me," Geoffrey returned, his pale olive cheek flushing for the first time with annoyance.

"Well, that's a good one—when I'm Viola's father, and you imagine yourself engaged to her! I don't know who else it should concern, young man."

Geoffrey swallowed his wrath with a

supreme effort. He would have given anything for leave and safety to knock the man down.

"Well, sir—yes. I have."

"And what for? Were you in debt?"

"I was to some extent. I foolishly reckoned too much on my uncle's property. I wanted to start with a clean slate and begin to economize."

"To economize!" Mr. Field snorted incredulously. "And how are you setting about *that*?"

"I have given up my chambers, which were too expensive, and taken some cheaper rooms. I am going in for my profession, and, I think I may say, getting on in it."

"H'm, I can't say I believe much in the economy of a young blood like you, who goes everywhere and keeps up with fellows worth double. Do you expect Viola to be willing to *economize* too? I can tell you, plainly, the girl has no more idea of that than this stick. She's never

been used to it. She hasn't the habits, nor the strength, and what's more, I won't see her dragged into poverty. I tell you flatly, Trevenna, your uncle's marriage just made things impossible that weren't desirable before. It's best to be downright. Viola's not the sort, nor are you, for 'bread and cheese and kisses.' 'When poverty looks in at the door, love flies out of the window.'"

"I should never wish to take her into poverty," Geoffrey said, in a suppressed voice.

"Well, how do you propose to help it? You have reduced your capital which was small enough before; your prospects of rising in your profession are in the remote future; as for your *economy*—bah, I can't believe in that! Of course you expect that I shall give Vi a thumping fortune?"

"Excuse me," the other retorted icily, "I expect nothing of the sort. I am no fortune-hunter. I proposed to your

daughter because I was in love with her. She accepted me for the same reason on her side. I had fair prospects then—I could not foresee the change in them.”

“No. I’m aware you’ve had hard lines. Feeling that, and wanting to let the girl down gently, I didn’t make any difference at first. But I’m a man of the world, a business man; it ain’t likely that I shall give my consent to my only child’s marriage with a man who can’t keep her as I’ve a right to expect, as she’s been used to be.”

“If Viola wishes to be released,” Geoffrey began. Then something rose in his throat, and choked the rest of the sentence.

“Well,” Mr. Field said eagerly, “whether she does or no, you ought to give her the chance. Write to her—you’re an honourable fellow, I know, and wouldn’t want to bind a girl against her interests. Write to her. I’m going over there in a week

or two to fetch 'em back. This had better be settled one way or the other before then. Of course, Viola may be romantic, and all the rest of it ; but she shall not do this with my consent. Unless she marries as I wish, I shan't give her a penny ; it shan't be from my house, and she's not of age yet."

"I will write," Geoffrey repeated, getting up from his seat ; he could not endure the galling torture any longer. At the moment it seemed to him too great a penalty to pay even for bliss to be connected with this vulgar braggart, who rattled the sovereigns in his pockets under one's nose, and swaggered about as if his money gave him a claim to the homage of the world.

It was with the hateful memory of this interview, and under the equally hateful compulsion to send this letter, that Geoffrey had played his part at Mrs. Spencer's, and his heart was dull and sore enough under the gay exterior, which he felt impelled to

put on when the eyes of the world were on him. He had taken trouble in his good-natured, generous way—for he was lavish in other things than money—to give his cousin pleasure, and to show her a brighter side of life than had been her lot hitherto to know, but he forgot her when he was alone. His mind was full of Viola, and the letter he had to write to her. Her pretty, wistful face, with its half-veiled smile, that looked at him from the carved frame on his writing-table brought tears into his eyes. He had not shed any for many a year, but now he put his head down on the desk, where the blank sheet of paper lay ready for the words he had to write on it, and sobbed as if he had been the sensitive little lad who cried for home ages ago when first he went to school. He had done his best to harden himself since, to laugh at emotion, and play the cynic; but the sensitiveness which made him miserable or supremely

happy by turns, when he was in his first youth, was only skinned over by the habits of a conventional selfish sort of life, not really cured. He was a man who depended greatly on others, and who needed to be loved. If Viola—if it were conceivable that his little Viola could turn him off, life seemed likely to transform itself into a land of sand and thorns; the bare imagining of such a thing was scarcely to be borne. Yet the letter had to be written, he had given his word, and it had to be a calm, reasonable, and gentlemanly effusion, free from gush or cant. He was as good at expressing himself on paper as Viola was bad, and she had cherished every letter she had from him as a precious treasure. This, when finished, was a very good one, and did not show a trace of the anguish that wrung tears from the solitude that produced it. It did not occur to Geoffrey to bear a grudge to Penrose for the fact of her existence,

but he was conscious of a wish that the present Mrs. Richard Trevenna had either never been born or had remained in the original obscurity of her native village in Cornwall.

That very night which witnessed his throes over that fateful letter, had brought its separate pain to his cousin Penrose. She had been surprised out of her usual self into keen enjoyment that evening, she had suddenly discovered that society might be charming, and that she was not so out of the way of all the beaten tracks of pleasure as she had supposed. Mr. Lyons had, as it were, revealed a possibility of a life that might be actually delightful, and in which she was fit to take a place. Mrs. Spencer's suave cordiality had given her a sense of ease and content, which she had never known before in the society of men and women of the world.

She went to her room with a glow of hope and pleasure at her heart, which

made everything seem changed, warmed, enlarged. After all she was young, she could enjoy, she was no ascetic! As she brushed out her long, thick, wavy locks, she wove fancies of a different sort of life from what she had had. Then strangely, suddenly, as if some one had spoken at her ear, she became conscious of some words she had read that morning in a novel she had taken up: "While society is what it is, it will punish the children whose parents have sinned in bringing them into being. It seems cruel, yet perhaps in the end the laws of society and the laws of God work together in this respect."

She started, and in a moment the hopes faded, and the vision was gone. She remembered her experience, only so recent, at Redwood, Mrs. Underwood's cold look and guarded words, the tacit avoidance of the little county world. It must surely be the same here in

London, the people were not so different, a little quicker, cleverer, more advanced, but governed by the same ideas, hedged in by the same restrictions. These girls here to-night, they had proud fathers and mothers, homes to talk about, nothing in the background on which they must keep silence. When they went to places of their own there was no shame to carry with them! She had been wrong, she was afraid, to let Geoffrey's kindness bring her here. It did not matter being with Mrs. Morrison, who knew everything and minded nothing, whose easy kindly tolerance had accepted her blandly on Mr. Grey's account; but it was mean, it was wrong to let Mrs. Spencer believe she was in the position of other girls who came to her house. She must tell her, she must shorten her visit. She could not bear deception; pain, torture even, was infinitely preferable. If only it were possible to speak the truth without blemish

to her mother's name! *That* was the cruel part of the necessity which lay upon her. She ought not to have placed herself in the position. She heaped blame on herself as if it took all from her mother.

The very next morning she took the first opportunity, one Mrs. Spencer gave her by talking over the plan of visiting the studios which Mr. Lyons had started, of unburdening her mind of the weight upon it.

"I don't know whether I ought to go to fresh houses—I am afraid I ought not to have come here, Mrs. Spencer, without your knowing exactly all about me." She spoke quite clearly and strongly, though the effort made her flush up to the roots of her hair, as a martyr might have declared the faith that led to the stake, and she looked straight into the astonished face of her hostess.

"My dear! What can you mean?"

What on earth can there be to know about you?"

"You *don't* know anything?"

"Only that you are Geoffrey Trevenna's cousin, and have come to live at Redwood."

"Nothing about my mother?"

"No; that is to say—of course I heard that Mr. Trevenna and she were separated, that he kept the fact of his marriage from the world. But that does not concern anybody but just yourselves."

"I wish I could feel that I need not say it," Penrose said, in a sad but steadfast voice; "but I can't. I don't know anything about the world, about how people feel and think in society, people in your position, only from books, and from a very little experience; but I have read, and indeed I have found out that when one is not born as—I mean when one has no right to a place and a name like girls who have nothing in their past to tell—

it is not right to be accepted under false pretences. I am called Trevenna ; Geoffrey has been generous enough to acknowledge me ; but I have no real right to any honourable name. My mother is Mr. Trevenna's widow ; but I—you can understand what I am without my having to say more. I don't feel as if I had any right to your hospitality. I ought, I know, to have remembered sooner. I ought not to have accepted it."

Mrs. Spencer had not in the least a lofty code of morals, to *seem* all right was, in her eyes, to *be* all right. It half-amused, half-shocked her to listen to Penrose's most unnecessary confessions. What on earth did it matter to any one here—especially when there was no marriage or love-affair in question—whether she had, or had not a moral right to be called Trevenna ? She was known as Miss Trevenna, and would have a good deal of money. Though unconventional to a

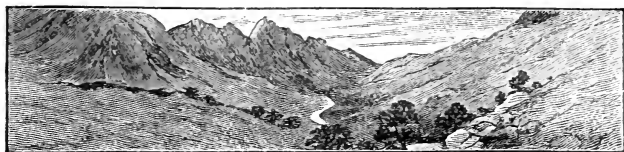
fault, she was presentable; no one need rake up the past or worry about antecedents. But she had an instinct that always made her understand how to take people. She showed no levity—Penrose was in such deadly earnest.

“My dear girl,” she said, quite gravely and kindly, “it’s very honest and nice of you to tell me all this, since you fancy it may make a difference; but I am not so uncharitable I hope. It is a pity, of course, a sad thing for you to have any mystery of the sort—there might be people ill-natured enough to work it against you; but I am not one of those. Let us forget it. *I* shall not let anybody know, and I assure you you need not. No one will go beneath the surface, and you yourself are worthy to meet people who have nothing of the sort in their lives. Don’t be morbid, dear, and fret about this. No one worth knowing will trouble, and it is quite enough to say you

are Miss Trevenna without entering into any particulars. I do admire your courage and straightforwardness, but in society we need not go into things like this. No one will trouble about what it concerns no one to know."

Penrose was fain to be satisfied; but something rang false, she knew not what. Was it because she was to have money that she was accepted, to a certain extent, in society? The problem of concealment or non-concealment often lay heavy at her heart.





CHAPTER XI.

MR. FIELD had set the full force of his heavy, decided and obstinate mind on the resolution to break off the engagement between his daughter and Geoffrey Trevenna, and to bring one about, in its place, with his "friend Tom Lees." In aid of this purpose he had written constantly to his wife, urging her, by every motive which he knew to be potent with her, to work upon Viola for the same intent. Mrs. Field, Mrs. Williams, and Mr. Lees had gradually formed a tacit league, tacit or almost so, for hints had passed, and each well understood the

hopes and endeavours of the others. Mrs. Williams was heartily and unselfishly fond of the pretty, soft, caressing girl, whom it was a pleasure to pet and fondle, and who repaid kindness by the sweetest responsiveness. She wanted her only brother to marry, and liked to picture a future when she might occupy herself in agreeable fusses over baby nephews or nieces. She was childless, her brother's early marriage had only lasted a few months, and left no trace on either of their lives, and Viola was dearer to her than any other girl, than almost any one in the world after this same big, burly brother, who, being ten years and more her junior, still seemed young and interesting in her indulgent elder-sisterly regard. Mrs. Field's motives were not altogether sordid, her husband had played upon her ever-constant fear for Viola's health. She was honestly convinced that her child could stand neither the wear and

worry of a long engagement, nor the tiresome privations of poverty. What seemed to Penrose's unsophisticated mind comfort and ease, was dire destitution to the woman who thought nothing of spending a clerk's yearly income on flowers for a dance. Viola in a small town house, with two maidservants, restricted not only in flowers and bonbons, but even in champagne and oysters, was a vision of dread to her. "The poor darling," she told herself, "had no notion what it was like to go without anything she fancied, and would never be able to live at all, if her delicate appetite were not humoured and things made smooth and easy for her."

Of course, Mr. Field could have endowed her with a very good fortune had he chosen, but he emphatically declared his hard-earned money should never go for Trevenna to make ducks and drakes of. He had begun selling out capital

already, and would never make a fortune at the Bar, and had no notion at all how to feather his nest, was far too fine a gentleman to turn into a man of business. He had better marry his cousin, whom he had taken up tremendously in spite of her base birth, perhaps he kept the idea to fall back on when he couldn't get Viola.

Mrs. Field's mind was gradually turning from Geoffrey, whom she had liked for his handsome person and attractive manners; and she saw less and less to object to in Mr. Lees' appearance and demeanour. Yes, he was a little loud, perhaps, she acknowledged when Viola found fault; but so good-hearted and generous, and such a clever manager!

"And he'd do anything in the world, or give anything to please *you*, you ungrateful child."

"I'm not ungrateful," Viola returned, pouting. "He *is* awfully kind and nicer

here than he was in London; but he is middle-aged, and fat, and has red hair. And the back of his neck is so ugly."

No one had ventured, however, not even her mother, in their most confidential talks, to put it plainly to Viola that her engagement with Geoffrey was hopeless, or that she had better take a substitute to him in the person of the widower of forty-three, who was always at hand to humour her whims, and to make himself a slave to her wishes.

Her mother only had a way of talking sadly and hopelessly about the time that they would have to wait, the uncertainty of Geoffrey's ultimate prospects, and the extreme undesirability of long engagements. Viola herself had ceased to feel buoyant about the future—she knew in her heart that she was not made for even comparative poverty, and she was angry with Fate for having changed Geoffrey's

prospects, and with her own incapacities. Yet, now and then, in the midst of her enjoyments, in the loveliest scenes in the world, loaded with gifts, luxuries, and pleasures, she felt a wave of longing come over her, of passionate desire for the sight of Geoffrey's dark handsome face ; for the light that came into his eyes when they rested on her ; for the sound of his cultivated voice, so different from Mr. Lees' thick common cockney tones ; for the touch of his lips, and the clasp of his hands, for the very feel of the cloth of his coat when she used to nestle her face in his breast, and was silent and still and in bliss. No man could ever touch and thrill her like that. She had never known what the word passion meant till she learnt it from his eyes and lips. Now that she knew the lesson, it often made her fragile, small frame quiver under the mere memory of the sweet moments which had been. She was shaken and torn between this longing

and her conviction that she was not made to endure any hardness, and to marry Geoffrey now would be to purchase care, and a thousand small privations from which she shrank like the exotic she was. The best plan, she thought, was to try not to look forward, and not to allow herself to dwell on the sensations and remembrances which shook her so. She was always apparently gay, feverishly ready to enter into the constant variety and pleasure of the days which Mrs. Williams' wealth and good-natured hospitality made one round of enjoyment. The villa by the lake was crammed with a constant succession of visitors ; picnics, excursions, moonlight rows, impromptu dances, and such-like devices to speed the time filled every day and every hour.

The English post one evening brought Viola a letter from Geoffrey which felt much less bulky than usual ; she took it

to her own room. Her mother had had one by the same post from her husband, which prepared her for the contents of the other. The crisis she had wished for, yet dreaded, had come. She knew well enough what the substance of that letter of Viola's must be. She sat, irresolutely, a little paler than usual, twisting the sheet her husband had sent her in her fat white hands. Perhaps Vi would want to be alone—yet, if the child were in trouble, she could not bear her to have to suffer by herself. She always hated and trembled at the thought of Viola's pain, whether bodily or mental. When she was a little delicate thing, subject to earache, toothache, headache, all sorts of small aches, her pitiful crying had been torture to her mother who would thankfully have endured any agony to free her from it. This anxiety, this vicarious suffering that she had had to bear for her one child, had been the only bitterness that the easy, good-

naturedly selfish woman had ever known. She had, it is true, wished and worked for the result, which seemed about to happen, yet the immediate distress it might give the child was an evil her heart shrank from. She started up suddenly, resolved to go and see what had happened to Viola, and how she was taking it. She found the girl with the letter open in her lap. She was lying back in an American lounging chair, perfectly still; her eyes were looking absently straight before her, a spot of vivid red burnt in the centre of each pale, rather thin cheek. She was not crying, Mrs. Field felt puzzled by her curiously passive air. She understood Viola as well, by the instinct of the one strong affection of her nature, as she was capable of understanding anything, for her scope was not large, but she did not now grasp the mental attitude of the girl. Viola was oddly paralyzed and stunned by strong

emotions; she often seemed the least capable of feeling when feeling most. It was a physical result largely, and a constitutional one.

"Darling, is anything the matter?" her mother asked, a little tremulously.

"Yes," Viola answered, in a languid, low tone. "I've had a letter—from Geoffrey. He thinks we had better not be engaged any more. He says there is no prospect before us for a long time, and that he ought not to tie me. It is a cold, business-like sort of letter, I think. I suppose *he* is tired of me. I am not surprised, for I am awfully stupid, I know."

"Nonsense, child!" her mother began indignantly, then she broke short. Was not this, after all, the best way of treating the affair, of cutting the knot? If Viola's pride and resentment could be roused, she would sooner be willing to agree to the rupture, sooner console herself.

“You’re not a bit stupid,” her mother went on, after this pause of rapid thought, “you’re miles too good for him every way. We—papa and I—felt from the beginning it wasn’t the match you ought to make, but we never could bear thwarting you. As to being tired of the engagement—well, to be sure, men are apt to be fickle and to like change, and every one knows they get restless under a long waiting; but I’d hardly think so badly of Geoffrey. To be sure papa does hint——”

“Hint what? I hate hinting!” Viola said sharply, the red spots deepening on her face. “Tell me out what you mean, mummy.”

“He may be wrong; he says Geoffrey is very thick with this new cousin of his, this Miss Trevenna, who’s suddenly turned up from goodness knows where and what, and has come in for Redwood—or will when that mother of hers dies. It

would be a good thing for him in that way. But there may be nothing in it."

"He wouldn't marry for money—for Redwood. But he may easily be tired of me!"

"For goodness' sake don't lower yourself like that, Vi!" her mother cried angrily. "A girl ought to keep up her proper pride; and there's heaps of men, worth fifty of a poor, idle, extravagant sort of fellow like Geoffrey Trevenna, who'd just give their eyes for you. Tired of you, indeed!"

"Well," Viola said wearily, "I'm often tired of myself. Mummy, you're not to abuse him—I won't have it. Oh, mummy, my heart, my heart hurts me!"

She moaned suddenly, and leant forward, stretching out her arms. Her mother sat down by her, drew her to rest against her, caressed and rocked her as if she had been a baby.

“ Press your hand there, on my side, mummy—it hurts.” She placed her mother’s hand against her left side ; the heart fluttered like a captured bird.

“ My lovey—my angel! You’re not ill ? ”

“ No, I’m not—not ill ; I don’t think so. I feel a little queer ; I have a sort of pain ; but I can’t tell what gives it me. It’s better when you press—so—and I lean on you. It will go off. Yes, mummy, it *is* a cold letter ! ”

She spoke oddly, trailing her words in a sleepy sort of way, not as if she were in great trouble. Mrs. Field felt perplexed, flurried, uncertain.

“ I wouldn’t fret about him, darling. You never could bear a long hopeless affair, and papa couldn’t help you to marry if he felt it wouldn’t be for your happiness, could he, love ? Papa and I would do anything for *that*, you know,

Vi. It's only your good we think of all the time."

"Of course I know you've always been kind, mummy."

"Kind! I'd cut my hand off for you, Vi. It isn't *kindness*. If I honestly thought it would be best for you to go on with this, I'd back you up in it against papa; but I don't—I can't, dear. There's nothing in breaking off an engagement—lots of girls do. Why, just think of Connie; she was engaged three times, and now she's going to marry *well*, and is as happy as she can be."

"I—I don't feel as if I could write it, mummy!"

Mrs. Field was astonished at her girl's docility and acquiescence; she had expected tears and an obstinate objection. Had she really grown tired of her engagement? Was she really less sensitive, less romantic than she had seemed? In truth Viola did not understand herself. She

was not conscious of anything much, at the moment, but a curious numbness. She was afraid of being sorry, of any violent access of feeling ; she found it easiest to be led, to yield, to have to be told what to do, what to feel. It was a strange instinct. Something, as it were, rose to protect her frail strength ; something, herself not herself, told her that she *dare* not give way to grief or resistance. That curious, vague, hovering pain which threatened her must be averted by the submission of her feelings. A thousand times she had been warned by her mother, by her own senses, that she was not made to bear trouble, that she must seek, must cling to her own happiness. Other girls were different. She had felt, in the short time she had known Penrose, how different she was, how braced and armed against endurance, strong to suffer, strong to save, strong to help. But she was not strong ; she could not help it. A mere cobweb

will injure a butterfly, the light touch of a finger will brush all the down from its wings. Is it the butterfly's fault? It was only made for flower-petals and for sunshine.

"You need hardly write anything, dearie," her mother said, stroking and soothing her down with soft, slow touches. "Just that he is right, and that it is best that you shouldn't be bound; that we think so—that's all. And send him back your ring."

Viola looked at the tiny, slight, white fingers that lay on her lap, fingers that could neither work nor fight, so small and weak that a strong grasp might almost crush the frail bones that showed their form under the tender white skin. The ring Geoffrey gave her, though small enough, was grown too large, and hung loosely; she had lost flesh when she was ill a month ago, and had always been thin enough.

“My poor ring!” she said, under her breath. “It doesn’t fit now. But I need not be in a hurry to send him that, surely! My left hand would look strange without it.”

“You must not wear it, Vi, if you break this off.”

“No, I suppose not. Mummy, can’t I leave it till we go home? Perhaps something will happen——”

“No, no, darling; you can’t possibly! You must end it one way or another; and if Geoffrey doesn’t wish it to go on, how can you? It’s on his account, as well as yours! You really must decide, Viola.”

Viola drew a long, sobbing breath; not a tear had come. She was oddly submissive.

“Well,” she said, letting the words drop one by one, “I suppose—it must be. He writes as if he did not care; but we were very happy at first, mummy, when

everything seemed all right. It's a pity things change so ; it's a pity one can't go on for ever and ever, when one is glad. I will write—if I must.'





CHAPTER XII.

GEOFFREY had written coldly that letter to Viola, as men do when they are afraid of letting themselves say too much. But he had not intended it to be cold; had hardly realized that it was so, or that this could be made to work against him, together with absence from his personal influence, and the presence and constant action of adverse ones.

He waited with feverish and sickening impatience for her answer, yet he hardly expected Viola to accept the offer of her release. The memory was strong on him of her caressing, clinging, yet delicate love. If she had been of stronger stuff, it would

have been passionate, he thought ; but she was too finely, airily made, for much passion. When he was falling asleep, or in his dreams, he seemed to hear the actual tones of her voice, full of that pathetic, wistful sweetness that belonged to her, as its scent does to a violet. She would not be willing to give him up. Whatever they said or did to persuade her, she was too fond of him, little darling ! Yet he dreaded the letter ; his heart beat thick every time he heard the postman knock, even before it was possible to hear. At last it came, and he knew what it meant before he opened it, for it was registered. He was sure that it would show him her ring ; that was enough without a letter. He opened the little box, took out the cotton wool, unfolded the tissue paper. Yes, he knew what he should see. No fresh gift from her lavish store, but that little marquise ring of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, that

he paid so absurd a price for a year ago. Such a tiny thing to cost so much ! Why, it looked fit for a baby's finger ; it would not pass the first joint of his smallest, and he had not a large hand. Thus thinking idly, he pushed it on the end of his little finger ; he had not cared to read the letter. But that had to be done ; it would not take many seconds—it was short enough ! He caught himself wondering if there were room in it for any of her usual mistakes of spelling. There was not certainly room for many, just this—

“I send back your ring. I dare say you are right, and that it may be best for our engagement to be over. I am very sorry ; but they never would have consented, and it would be very bad and tiring for you. We needn't quarrel or be bad friends, I hope. I cannot really write a longer letter, and I do not know what more to say. Good-bye !

“VIOLA.”

“Good-bye, Viola !—good-bye, Viola !”
He caught himself saying these three words over and over again, in echo of

hers. "Good-bye, Viola!" almost dully, till the sense seemed to filter through them; and then he started to his feet, while grief and anger thrilled and stung him. "Oh, how they must have worked upon my poor little girl! Too bad! too bad!—for she was wretched when she wrote that. She never would have done it if I could have gone to her and held her in my arms—never! Her soft, soft little mouth would have trembled into a kiss, and she would have told me she couldn't live without me. But I can't get to her—I can't do anything! They'll never let her out of their clutches now. God knows what they'll make her do between them! I gave her the chance—I must accept it; but oh, my little sweet, things have been hard on you and me! A year ago, when I put that ring on your little white hand, how happy we were! And I know you're not happy now."

He recalled one afternoon when some-

thing had gone wrong and they had quarrelled a little—he could not remember what about, but he vividly remembered that she had cried, and his own disgust at himself. She was so piteously pathetic, with that trembling mouth, and her eyes like wet violets, that he felt as if he had been hideously cruel. Other people might cry and nobody care, but when *Viola* did, no one who loved her could bear to see it. And he was sure that bald, brief note had been written between tears. He did not blame her; he ought not to have expected her to be strong enough to stand out for him against all her world. He did not guess how cold his letter had struck on her heart, nor how much that had had to do with her decision.

He could not settle to any work, a need of some sympathy was strong on him. Geoffrey was not used to trouble, and chafed under it with a desire for pity and fellowship. He would go and find

Penrose. He felt certain of her understanding and comradeship. He had not a man friend he cared to confide in, with them he could always manage to keep up an air of lordly *insouciance*, for it is "bad form" to feel anything much, or to bore people in society with one's miseries. But Penrose was not "in society," she was used to seeing things in a plain unvarnished fashion, not dressed to look pretty and adorned with fictions, she knew the plain savage facts of sorrow and loss, and would be ready at once to understand what this meant to him. She had always had a belief in his future and Viola's faith; he could not have gone to any one who had predicted a downfall in both.

He was lucky in finding that Mrs. Morrison had gone out—Mr. Grey had returned to Oxford after a short stay in town—but that Miss Trevenna was upstairs. She was standing reading a letter, and her face was a little grave and anxious.

She just glanced up to greet him, and then back again at the rather untidy sheet she held.

“Oh, I am glad you are come, Geoffrey! I have a letter from Jane—from my aunt; you know she likes best for me to call her Jane. I am afraid mother is not well. Will you see what she says? But she does not write plainly, I had better tell you.” At that moment, looking up at him, something jaded and depressed in his expression struck her, and she broke off.

“But is there anything wrong with *you*, Geoffrey? What is it?”

She kept her clear kind gaze fixed on him, it seemed to him, just how a sister would have looked.

He threw himself down heavily on the old-fashioned ottoman sofa, and Penrose came beside him.

“I am feeling rather bad, Penrose,” he said slowly. “I came on purpose to

tell you, because I feel sure of your sympathy; but you have your own worry. I am sorry if your mother is ill."

"Let that be now," she answered quickly, "I want to hear what is the matter with you. Nothing with Viola?"

"Yes, everything. It is all at an end, Penrose."

Penrose caught his hand and pressed it between hers. She cried impetuously, with her heart in her voice—

"Oh, Geoffrey! Oh, my poor boy!"

The cry, the words, the warm close clasp, were so strangely impulsive, so affectionate, that Geoffrey almost started. He had expected kindness, a comprehending sympathy from her, but he had never really known before the warmth of heart that so instantly opened to him. She did not keep his hand, however, she let it go, and, as if half ashamed of her own expansion, drew a little away. Yet she did not shrink from friendly warmth of manner.

Why should she? There was nothing that she felt that need shame her.

"Tell me about it," she said; "you know how dreadfully sorry I must be. Tell me exactly why it has happened, Geoffrey."

"Oh, there's only one reason. I told you about that the day we were in the Park. I told you that Viola's father was dead against us; her mother, too, I suppose. I felt bound to set her free, if she couldn't face the idea of a long, hopeless sort of waiting; and I suppose she could not."

"But no father or mother could make her willing to give you up, so long as she loved you."

"Ah, Penrose," he said bitterly, "you judge other girls by yourself. You have never lived in the *grande monde*. To live poor—as they count poverty—is to endure a living death. What's love compared to enjoyment? Love's a vulgar

sort of sentiment that is not in the fashion."

"Oh, don't talk so—don't talk so!" Penrose cried vehemently. "Viola wasn't like that. I don't believe it—I won't believe it."

"Why, what could you know of Viola?" he asked, half laughing. "You saw her for half an hour."

"Yes. But there are faces that reach one's heart in less than half an hour. She had such sweet pathetic eyes."

"Well, if you will have it so, let's agree to put all the blame on the old people, on Fate, on me, on anybody you like. God knows it comes hard to think any harm of *her*."

"If my mother and I had been still as we were at Copsley this would not have been." This was Penrose's thought. She did not put it into words, for she had grown shy of saying such things to Geoffrey. She looked at him sadly, with

deep, kind, compassionate eyes. Some man might be happy, it crossed his mind, having those candid eyes to trust to, that warm hand-clasp to comfort him in the ups and downs of life. He had *liked* Penrose before now, but to-day she took a new place in his heart, a warm corner that would be cold if it no longer held her.

“I’m a selfish beast, Penrose,” he said, in a boyish brotherly way, which seemed new to her, “I believe you have something on your mind, and I do nothing but throw myself on your sympathy. What is wrong with your mother?”

“I don’t know. Jane writes, and she is not much of a hand at it. It is all in short little sentences. She doesn’t know if much is the matter; but mother seems weak, she does not care to do anything, not even to knit, and she keeps falling asleep. I must go home.”

“Must you? That is a pity. You are

looking so much better and brighter than when you came. This atmosphere of pictures and artist society seems to have revived you better than a tonic."

"I have enjoyed it—I shall have it all to think about, and I shall not give up now trying to do more with painting. I will set up a studio at Redwood. I might have done so before, only I grew languid about it; there was no one to care, no one to talk to, it did not seem worth while, and did nobody any good."

"Nobody but you, you mean. Well, why should you be always so much less kind to yourself than to other people? There's such a thing as over-unselfishness, Penrose."

"Is there?" she said gravely. "I doubt it."

He laughed. "It is not a common sin, I own, not one to warn the generality of people against. But *you* need sermons

against asceticism. You have obsolete notions, I believe, about mortifying your flesh."

"Nonsense. I am quite as much in danger of being selfish as anybody. I am so now, because I feel sorry to go away from London."

"When shall you go?"

"To-morrow morning."

"I have nothing to do. I will take you down."

"No; that would be an absurd waste of time—as if I could not take care of myself. If you have nothing to do, I am sure you ought to have."

"Penrose, the spring seems broken in me. I don't care to get on—there's no motive."

"Dear Geoffrey, don't say so—don't." She stretched out her hand to him involuntarily, longing to reach and touch him with her kindness. He clasped and kept it, the strong large hand, large yet not coarse,

so utterly unlike the little clinging touch that he had lost out of his life ; but " friendship's much," it warms the heart, if it does not fire the pulses.

" Don't say you have no motive—don't talk as if there wasn't happiness for you some day. Your future must not be spoilt. Perhaps, perhaps it is all a mistake—about Viola, I mean. I feel sure she *does* care still."

" Yes, I believe she does—for me a good deal, but for other things yet more. And they'll persuade her to promise herself to some one who can give her what I can't."

" Oh no, no, no !"

" Penrose, you don't know the compelling forces of convention and custom ; you've never put your neck under the yoke. But I'm not going maudling on about my losses and troubles. If you were not so kind I never should have spoken. You make a muff of one. I can bear it.

Other fellows have had to bear being jilted."

"She has not jilted you," Penrose broke in with, rather severely. "Did not you write to her first?"

"Yes, that's true. You're right to champion her, Penrose. I like you the better for it. No, it is beastly of me to blame her for what I did. There's no jilting in it at all; it was inevitable. I'll never blame her, whatever happens."

Yet, when he was gone, and Penrose, while she prepared for her journey home, thought over what had passed between them, she found herself, against her will, bringing an indictment against Viola. To have had for her own the beautiful possession of a man's best love, and to have let it go! To have been too feeble to keep a grasp on that precious gift! Oh, if only it had been her fate to be *loved*, not liked, as friends are, but loved with the passion and exclusiveness which

a man gives to the one woman whom of all the world he desires for his own, poverty, misfortune, suffering, agony, death—*nothing* should ever loosen her hold of that! She was kneeling on the floor, her hands dropped at her sides. She raised her head, and a flush of burning passion, burning but absolutely pure, as she was, came over her upturned face that was suddenly transfigured into beauty. She had never thought this thought before; never had this longing thus possessed her, to be just loved, woman by man, to know what a wife felt, and then die out with fruition in her soul. If there had been no Viola, if she had not deprived him of so much—oh, Geoffrey, could not I have loved you? Might not you—— But no, no. What was she thinking? It was a crazy fancy. Her face burned with shame this time. They were just friends, and even to that title she had no right, for she had done him harm, which he was generous to

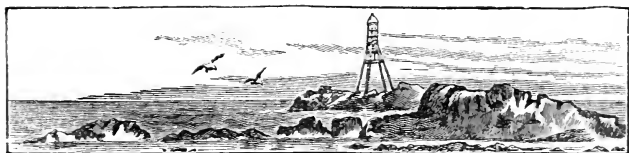
forget. Just friends, and to be friends, and nothing more, never anything more ! What made her think these mad thoughts ? What possessed her ? She was a fool of the eyes, she supposed, as other girls were. She liked, she cared for Geoffrey Trevenna because he had deep, dark, eloquent eyes that had a trick of making one feel strange, and a handsome expressive face ; because he had a voice that was perfectly agreeable to the ear, with its clear fine accent and subtle half-tones that seemed to mean all kinds of things. He was not great, or grand, or noble ; he had no lofty ideals. He was a man of the world, no genius, no great thinker, no knight of chivalry, such as she used to dream of in her days of budding girlhood.

“ No, but I *do* care for him.” This was the conclusion of it all. Penrose was too completely truthful to flatter her own self with vanities or fiction. “ If it had been possible, if everything had been different, I

would have let myself love him. It would not have hurt me to love him without any return. I am strong enough to bear that, and never show; and it is, it must be, worth while to love people, anyhow. But, as it is, I must not give myself up to this. I am strong; I can deny myself. I will be enough for my own self, and bear to be alone. Better to be alone than to let one's life hurt any other. If I can help it, if God will help me, it never shall do that!"

She flung herself against her bed, with her face on her folded arms, and a wordless prayer was in her heart. No, nobody should be the worse off that she was in the world; and as for personal happiness, why, those who are strong can bear not to be happy.





CHAPTER XIII.

IN spite of her self-discipline and high ideal of abnegation, Penrose's heart sank low as she left London behind, with the plans, hopes, and enjoyments which had come to her there. Mrs. Morrison had been more than kind; the fat, comfortable old lady who had never had a child, and whose happy temperament hardly let her regret even this, had the instincts of maternity, and had been more truly motherly to her young guest than any one had ever been. Penrose had been forced out of the daughterly part early by her own mother's feeble dependence and general inefficiency into that of a guardian and

protector. It was a new and delicious sensation to be cuddled, fussed over, and caressed by a warm, cushiony mass of goodwill, whose vocabulary was rich in epithets of endearment. Penrose had never been any one's "pet," "darling," "love" before, and she found the regimen sweet as well as novel. The kind old lady had, as she expressed it, "taken to her at once," partly because her "dear brother Edmund" had recommended the girl to her good offices, partly because the girl herself was so true, so unselfish, so surprised to find herself petted, so warmly grateful. She had "no nasty fast ways," Mrs. Morrison saw with relief, and "wasn't like the rest." Modern young womanhood so often nowadays calmly regards middle age as a stepping-stone merely whereby to reach some desired end, or if not useful in that way, as simply to be left out in the cold as general cumberers of the soil.

So the old lady and the young, in this case, parted with strong mutual regard and mutual regret. Penrose felt like a boy going back to school after the holidays. Redwood loomed before her gloomily enough. It was no use abusing herself for selfishness ; she could not but feel that her grief lay onwards, and her joy behind. She had just tasted what the free, happy life of an artist might be, had drawn one long breath in a new atmosphere ; but Duty—stern daughter of the voice of God — had clutched at her, and drawn her back into the round of small endeavours.

It does seem a little difficult to a woman, born with the soul of a knight-errant within her, to tame all her fighting and adventurous instincts into submission to so small a sphere, but conscience allows no choosing.

Penrose had always felt her mother's life had an imperious claim on hers, the

poor mother who had no one and nothing else in all this great rich world which she had found so poor, cold, and foggy. There was no one but her to warm and lighten it. She must carry home a cheerful look and smile, though her heart felt heavy.

Jane met her at the station. Her dark, worn face looked even more serious than usual; but the lines relaxed when she saw Penrose. Her love for her sister's child was seldom permitted to show itself visibly. More than fifty years of self-repression had forbidden the possibility of any open expansion of soul, but something of it gleamed in her sombre dark eyes and hovered round her tightly closed mouth. Penrose knew it was there well enough, and she put her face up to be kissed as simply as a child. If she had not done so Jane would have preserved the upper-servant manner which she chose to wear. She was surprised into a hearty kiss, but

glanced round immediately to see whether anybody who knew them were near to notice.

“Is mother *ill*, Jane?” Penrose asked with her first breath.

“I can’t rightly say. She won’t hear to having the doctor, and goes on saying she’s well; but I don’t know—somehow I don’t think it. She’s altered someways, grown obstinate and a bit irritable when she’s not drowsy and heavy. It seems to me as she’s never overgot that shock—you know, of last spring. It frightened and upset her so. To my thinking, she hasn’t been the same since. I’m glad to have you back, child. I seemed to fare to have some one to talk to about her. And you look well. My sakes, that’s a pretty dress and hat you’re wearing! I always thought well of your looks, but now——” Her glance travelled over the tall, straight figure, with visible satisfaction.

Penrose smiled; but her anxious look came back in a moment. "Mother must see Dr. Brett if she is not well," she said.

Mrs. Trevenna was roused to pleasure at first by the sight of her daughter, which brightened her dull looks, and for the moment deceived Penrose into thinking Jane was wrong; but when the novelty of her return had worn off, the heaviness returned, and a curious change became evident. Probably it had been gradually coming on, but her return after absence made it more plain to her.

Mrs. Trevenna asked a few questions at first, and listened to all her daughter had to say with some faint interest, which gradually sank down, as the redness in dying embers turns to grey. She left off talking, her listless hands let her knitting drop and lay motionless on her lap. Her heavy eyelids drooped over the lustreless eyes, which once had their own beauty,

now dead with her youth and all the warmth and colour of life. The still thick but grey hair that had been black, crisp, and living in the days of her summer was ruffled and disordered against the pillows into which her head sank, the sallow face had lost every charm it once had, but was infinitely pathetic in Penrose's eyes, which dwelt sadly and lovingly upon it. It was a wreck, and not a beautiful wreck, but her heart clung to it with a fixed habit of faithful fondness.

"To-morrow I will go and see Dr. Brett myself," she thought. "I am glad I came home at once."

Mrs. Trevenna objected to seeing Dr. Brett, with a good deal of irritation, much more than she had ever shown to any wish of Penrose's; but when he came she received him quietly enough, though she told him it was nonsense to say she was not well when she had no pain anywhere, could eat and sleep. He could not find

out much, as he told Penrose, beyond a want of vitality and some nervous disturbance; but one night she had a slight sort of fit, which seemed to alter her a good deal. He was perplexed, but thought change and effort desirable. His suggestion was that they should go to town, into comfortable lodgings, and consult a certain famous brain and nerve doctor in whom he had great faith. The dull life, the large empty house, with all its associations, he thought bad for her. She needed rousing, stimulus. He did not put into words a fear of his own that there were symptoms of softening of the brain and perhaps of a general paralysis. As he told his wife, he feared that poor girl had a weary time ahead of her; but she had pluck enough to face anything! Penrose had a way of giving this impression instantly of herself. It was her work next and Jane's to persuade Mrs. Trevenna into a wish for this change. At first she

was utterly averse to the idea of any sort of moving. She hated Redwood, she said, but she hated having to go anywhere else worse. She cried over their unkindness in wanting to disturb her, and her painful, feeble tears were agonizing to Penrose, though she still persisted, with gentle obstinacy, on her own point of view. Jane's authority, long undisputed since she first took the command of her sister's helpless life, proved the most efficacious treatment.

"Come, Molly, you've got to go. Be a good girl, and you'll not mind it," she said authoritatively. "Penrose and me'll take every mite of trouble off you, and you'll like the change when you're fairly out of this."

Geoffrey undertook to find them comfortable lodgings, which he did, close to the doctor to whom they were recommended, and close to an underground station, which put them easily in reach of

his own rooms. He was glad to hear that Penrose was, after all, returning. Her friendship had become much to him. He found himself able to talk to her as he could not to any one else, and on a different footing from any other. His look told her this, as he met them at the station. Their eyes fell upon each other in one of those glances which are suddenly a revelation of the inner self. His said, "I am glad to have you again," and hers—he was puzzled to put into words that full soft gaze which was not like any she had ever given him. He chose to call it sisterly; he had never had a sister to look at him in that way or in any way. He pressed her hand closely and warmly, and she felt a leap of happiness in all her pulses. London seemed like home; she was glad to be in its roar again. The lodgings were exceedingly comfortable and not noisy.

Mrs. Trevenna seemed brighter already

for the change. She liked to sit by the window and watch the street instead of the eternal trees, grass, and sky of which her soul had wearied vaguely. She wanted nothing so long as she could sit in a big cushioned chair by the window, staring out, with Jane beside her, working, ready to answer if she cared to speak, which was seldom, or now and then to make some brief remark in her curt, incisive way. The great doctor spoke hopefully of electricity, change, stimulating diet, tonics.

Penrose was relieved and cheered, and she was free now to do more as she wished, than she imagined she could be. Her mother did not really want her. She was contented, in her apathetic way, with Jane, though she always greeted Penrose with a languid pleasure and fondness that was as much as she now expected from her. She could go to the studio to draw, which belonged to a lady

artist to whom Mr. Lyons had introduced her. She began to study figures, which she had never had a chance of doing before, and she entered into it with an extraordinary zest. She began to feel as if an opening were made for her into new worlds; she stretched her cramped spirit and rejoiced. But Penrose was made of the stuff that cannot be satisfied with the satisfaction of self. She had the passion for service, the instinct to strive, to fight, the zeal for aiding others, which is the best which the *fin de siècle* has to show in its noblest.

When she walked, as she chose to do, alone and utterly fearless, to and from the studio, she passed through some poor and sordid byways, where her keen yet pitiful eyes soon found many a subject for resolves. When people have a desire to serve, work soon comes. She got her opportunity a Sunday or two after she had been in London. The report of a

certain man's preaching came to her ears, and she went to the ugly chapel, once a Church of England chapel of ease, where he was to be heard, a man who had outgrown mere episcopacy, but was passionately Christian. Doctrine, mere doctrine, had never laid much hold upon Penrose, who was one of those who can never stop seeking for perfection. The face of the preacher, that of a dreamer, poet, enthusiast, drew her, his theories of life caught her. It happened to be a sermon on the needs and demands of the wretched, and it struck on a heart full of them. With the curious directness of purpose which characterized her always, Penrose went to him in the vestry, and asked him to find her something to do, at once, while she stayed in London, anything, no matter how disagreeable.

"I don't mind about that; I'm not squeamish," she said, looking straight at him with her honest, clear gaze.

He responded to her as she wanted him to do, without fuss or sentimentalism, with a manly simplicity and good-fellowship which put them instantly almost on the footing of friends.

So Penrose's time was full. Three days a week she gave up to drawing, two to hard downright work in the nether world of London, Saturday and Sunday to relaxation and friendly intercourse. These last days Geoffrey claimed.

Penrose was surprising him with new developments. She was happier than she had ever been in her life. For the first time she could expand into a genial atmosphere and gratify the strongest instincts and tastes of her nature, and she blossomed under the sudden sunshine like a plant brought out of a cellar. He found that she could laugh heartily, that she could be excellent company, that she could enjoy fun like other girls, yet she was utterly unlike any girl he had ever known.

She did the most perfectly unconventional things with the simplest dignity of innocence. The ideas of the need of chaperonage, of the restrictions which hem in unmarried girlhood even in these emancipated days, of the necessity of reserve when frankness was unusual, never entered her mind, and there was no one to suggest them, for he would not; he liked her freedom, her comradeship, her open intimacy far too well. She went with him alone to places of amusement in the day or evening, as if she had been his sister, yet he did not pretend to mere brotherliness; their friendship had a charm that was not fraternal. He liked sometimes to find fault with her, to laugh at her disregard of appearances and her shameful want of vanity; but he seldom told her the truth that he had a secret respect for her integrity and affection for her noble loveliness, which had changed his whole view of life, and almost con-

verted him from the cynicism of his day and kind. Soon after they met again she asked him, more hesitatingly than was her wont, if he had heard anything of Viola. Had she come home?

His face clouded in a moment.

"Her father has gone to fetch them. There is a vile rumour about that she is engaged to Lees."

"Oh no, no!" Penrose cried, as if the words hurt, "that *can't* be true. Don't believe it! Lees is the man you spoke of, isn't he? whom her father likes—the rich, vulgar, middle-aged man? Oh, it isn't true, Geoffrey!"

"I don't know. Who can tell what their constant, persistent urging may do? But don't let us talk about it, Penrose."

Was it true? The report was in the air. He had heard it more than once. It sickened him. A little while ago it would have maddened him to think of his

little white Viola in the clutch of that coarse vulgarian. He wondered at himself for being able to put it out of his mind sometimes and be interested in life. Either he was a heartless brute, or—well, he did not formulate the alternative.

At last the matter was put beyond a doubt. He met Mr. Field, looking large, red, triumphant, a very monument of success. He would have passed with a mere “good morning,” but Field stopped him deliberately.

“We’re back, you see,” he said, nodding with a sort of insolent exultation of look and voice that made Geoffrey set his teeth against his desire to express his disgust. “We’ve had a glorious time. It’s done the missis and Vi no end of good. Don’t hurry off, Trevenna ; I wanted to speak to you. You acted in a very honourable, straightforward way in setting my girl free. I’m much obliged to you. I hope there’s no ill-will between us. All’s well

that ends well. My useless little girl would be a wretched wife for a poor man, and she sees that herself now, I suppose. We hope there will be a match before long. Perhaps you'll not be surprised to hear it. Lees has been spooney on Vi for years, almost before she was out of the nursery. You will forgive my saying it is the marriage I should always have chosen for her. Come, Trevenna, shake hands, and be friends."

He thrust out his great hand. Geoffrey allowed it to touch his. His handsome face looked perfectly, coldly unmoved, and artificial.

"I congratulate you, I'm sure. I hope it will turn out satisfactory in every way. I have no doubt your view of the affair may be the correct one. I am glad Miss Field is better."

He was going on, but Mr. Field still detained him.

"You'll call as usual? Mrs. Field will

always be glad to see you. Remember it was *you* that took the initiative in the matter."

"Thanks. I shall hope to call some time. Remember me kindly to Mrs. Field."

Geoffrey walked on, at first only conscious of self-congratulation on his own coolness. He hadn't shown the vulgar brute that he was hit! Then the pain of the blow began to ache. So soon! And Viola *had* been in love, passionately in love with him. He was sure of that! How had they managed it? Was she, after all, a mere doll, to be played with and handled as they pleased? Did she love money better than love? Was she such a coward as not to be able to bear a little hardness for love's sake? He supposed it was so. God had given her a lovely, pathetic face, that a child-angel might have worn, but the world had given her a hollow, weak, and paltry nature—

she was only a pretty sham. Her white violet sweetness was manufactured, not the wild perfume of the untrodden ways, but the bought essence of the shops. He had been fooled by her—he was glad to be free ! Well, perhaps he was—but, like the man let out of prison, the liberty even was a pain at first. He should get over it, and he never would be a fool again. He would never marry—at least he would never marry because a girl has a pair of lovely deep blue eyes, and a clinging, delicate shape. He walked on as if he wore seven league boots, the rapid rate seemed to relieve the angry tumult of his mind. Viola engaged to Tom Lees ! He had to repeat the words over and over again to get them fixed in his mind—they seemed to convey so hateful an idea, he refused to admit it at first. Yet Mr. Field had distinctly told him so ; he supposed there was nothing girls would not do for a big settlement ! All girls except Penrose

—but she was an exception to every conventional law that proved nothing. It seemed that for girls to be born discredibly, to be educated nohow, and to have neither friends nor opportunities, was the secret of making them above the common.

The thought of Penrose's certain sympathy and sure strong friendship was the first ray of brightness that dawned on his bitter mood. They were going to the theatre together that night. He had given in to a whim of hers to try the pit—she wanted to see what the people were like who looked on at such spectacles from the back seats ; besides, she could not get rid of a barbarous idea that it was *wrong* to spend half a sovereign or so every time one amused one's self. Yet she loved the drama, which appealed to the strong, simple directness of her tastes.

Geoffrey had never been to the pit of a theatre ; it was rather amusing to give in to Penrose, and try what it was like. He

was glad he had not got to spend the evening by himself, either compelling his attention to a "case," or brooding over the hateful mercenariness of the world—his world. Penrose would be as refreshing as a draught of cold water in a fever. One was always *sure* of finding her as one expected. It was something—yes, it was a great thing, to have Penrose for one's constant friend! He put the idea of Viola deliberately on one side, and allowed his mind to repose upon the idea of the absolute certainty of his cousin's good-will.

END OF VOL. II.

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